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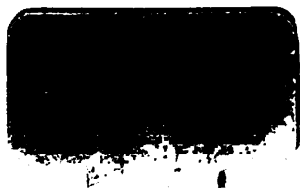
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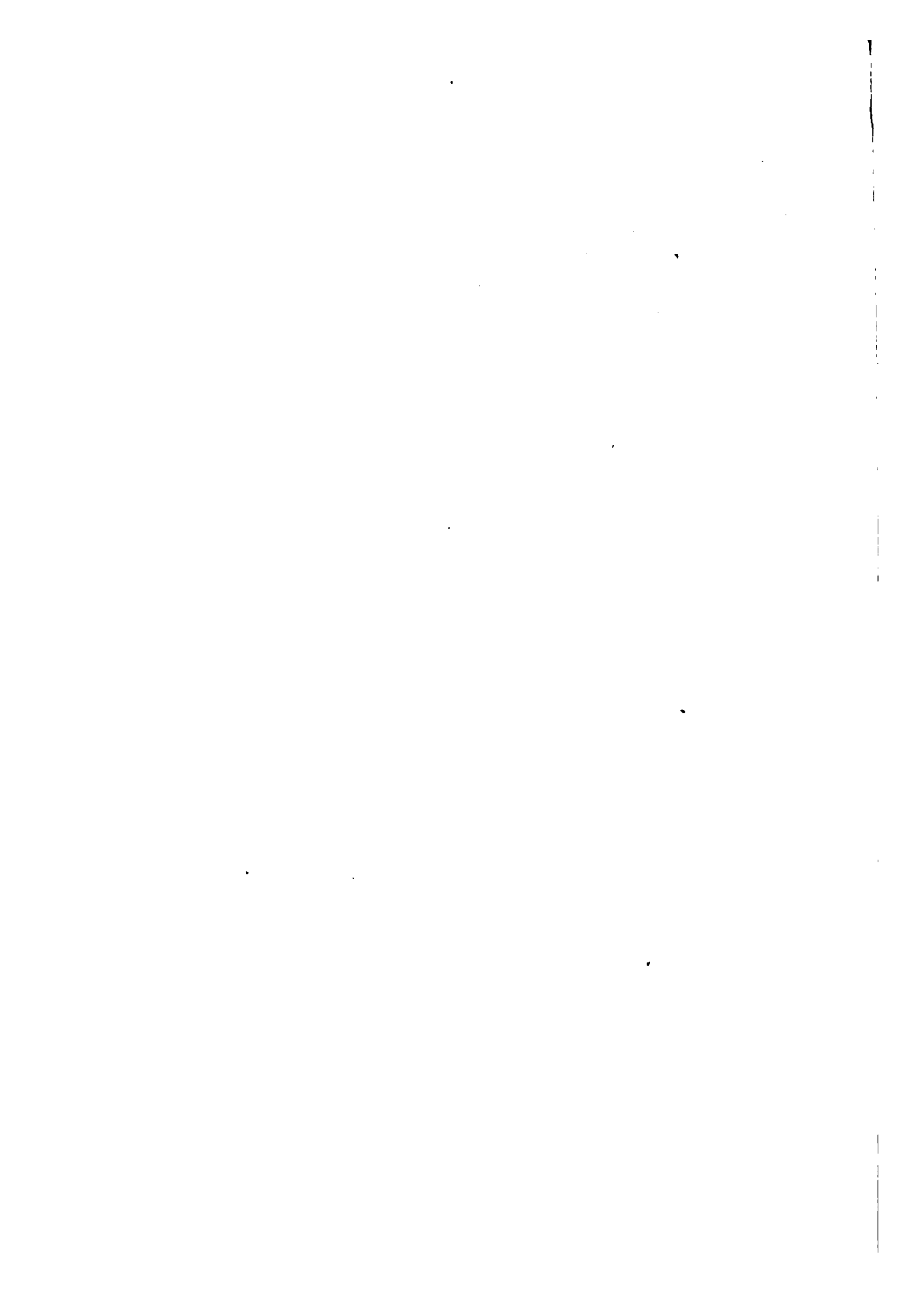
THE BARRYS

BY SHAN.F.
BULLOCK

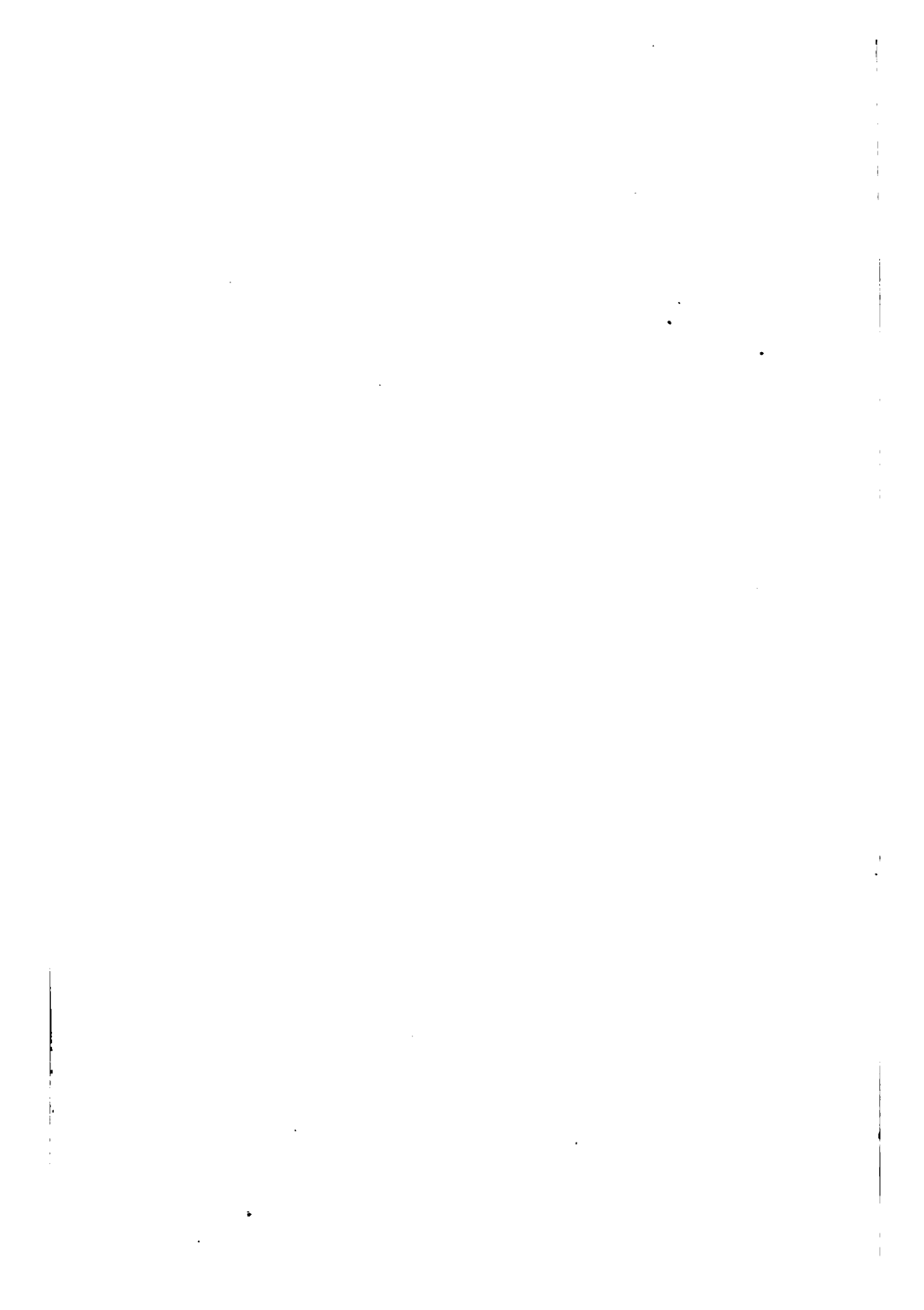


To: friend A. C. R. Carter

S. F. B.



THE BARRYS



THE BARRYS

by
Shan F. Bullock



New York
Doubleday & McClure Co.
1899

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TO
A. T. QUILLER-COUCH
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BOOK I.
INISHRATH



THE BARRYS.

BOOK I.

INISHRATH.

CHAPTER I.

It was a blustering day in early March, and, once quit of the bleak station and the noisy car-drivers assembled outside its porch, Frank Barry set his face quickly for Lismahee street. He was cold, cramped, tired to death of his journey ; it was glorious to have again the firm earth beneath his feet and the east wind on his cheek. What if he were hungry, unshaven, weary ; what if a six miles Irish lay between him and rest ; what if a memory of the pitiless sea, of the unutterable carriages and their distressful occupants, still haunted him like a nightmare ? He was away at last. Six miles would hardly warm his blood. The longer the fast the gladder the feast. He set his face to the wind and strode like a giant.

He entered Lismahee ; hurried along the broken sidewalk, past tradeless shops, gaunt white houses and silent streets ; turned to the right down an alley, went up past the workhouse and the churchyard ; suddenly, on the top of a hill, found himself in the same moment well rid of Lismahee and well met of the country. It was great, the change from the narrowness and poverty of man to the breadth and bounty

of nature. For a minute, Frank hung on his heel, threw a look, part scornful, part pitiful, backwards at the little town, let his eyes rest on the big ring of pines that lay beyond the huddled roofs, on the sweep of hills to right and left, on the loom of mountains far beyond and the flash of water near by ; then, with renewed vigour set on between the hedges down the long ferry road.

He crossed the railway, went up and down a hill or two ; presently found the road running flat as a table through a region of bogs. Here was no ditch on either hand, or hedge or fence ; just an open drain beyond the footpath, and beyond this again the rounded edge of the turf banks. For miles and miles the heather stretched, brown and stunted ; the black water gleamed in ugly bogholes ; this way and that ran the uneven cart tracks ; not a figure moved on its face, not a bird hung over its gloom ; like a place of desolation the bog stretched away to the roots of the hills, and over it the wind went howling, icy as from the frozen North.

With his collar round his ears and his head bent to the blast, Frank set his teeth, fixed his eyes on the road, and grimly plodded on ; at last, after a mile or so, found himself once more in shelter of the hills and flanked on either side by the welcome hedges. The change was blessed. He felt like a ship in port, wind-swept and driven no longer. Warmth spread through his limbs, the blood flared in his cheeks ; with his coat flapping, his pipe going, and at a slower step, he went on past the alder clumps, the rushy hills, the marshy flats ; suddenly had sight of dark masses of trees, of long lines of shore and great stretches of

water, and in a little while was standing beside Lough Erne on the pier of Garvagh ferry.

On this hand and that, as far as Frank could see, and in front of him about a mile in width, the lough lay cold and dreary beneath the low arch of a sombre sky. A stony shore bordered it ; up from it ran the bare fields and crooked hedges ; above it the hills reared their barren crowns ; here were belts of trees, there bleak patches of forest ; in the distance a square tower stood out against the sky ; far off was a range of mountains, nearer a great rock rose high above the water ; about midway over an island, fringed with trees through which showed the front of a thatched cottage, lay in its loneliness ; on the farther shore stood a rough stone pier, from which a continuation of the Lismahee road, you might fancy, went on and was lost in the gloom of a huddled plantation ; everywhere was cheerlessness, loneliness, no sound but the rushing of the wind and the flap of the waves, no life, no colour, no beauty.

For a while Frank stood on the pier ; then, having looked in vain for man or boat, turned and made for the little brick shelter which, its back to the ditch and its empty doorway to the road, stood beside a flag-staff some fifty yards or so back from the shore. The outside was naked, the inside gloomy. Round the walls were rough benches carved deep with the names and initials of thousands of rustics ; the plaster was thick with pencilled rhymes, witticisms ; near the door hung printed instructions for the guidance of any, be they strangers or locals, who wished to use the ferry. The charge for the conveyance of animals was so and so, of carts so and so, of pas-

sengers so and so; the ferryman lived on Inishrath island (wherever on earth that might be, thought Frank Barry) and could always be summoned by hoisting the green flag which hung on the staff outside; *at night, however, the directions ran on, or in times of mist or fog, passengers must shout.*

Thanking his stars it was daylight, for not Boanerges might shout against the rush of the wind, Frank went out, ran up the flag and sat him down on the edge of the pier to watch for the putting forth of the ferryman from Inishrath island. Here and there he looked; above him the flag cracked and flapped; pitilessly the wind dashed its icy darts in his face: before five minutes had gone, he was curled on a bench in the shelter, feet tucked beneath his ulster, hands deep in his pockets, his back resting against a corner of the wall.

He lit his pipe; listened a while for the rattle of oars; presently closed his eyes and fell a-thinking. What a plight he was in, to be sure; sitting there solitary in the cold, waiting for a ferryman that might never come. Suppose they did not see the flag? Suppose night came and he had to shout? Oh, no use bothering; and, at the worst, he could be in no sorrier case than he had been all the day. Still, confound it, it was a poor way to come back to the home of his fathers. Home of his fathers? Ah, think of that! Across the lake there his ancestors had bred, fought, died; there his own father had lived during many years; there he himself had sported as a boy; there his uncle still lived, old Hugh, the last of the Irish Barrys. . . . Had he ever, as a lad, stood out there on the road shivering in the

wind? He wondered. Somehow, he fancied he had. He seemed to remember things; not things but the shadows of them. Somehow, that long bleakness of road had not seemed unfamiliar; somehow, he seemed looking out even then on a familiar scene.

Anyhow, there he was, back again in old Ireland, back after twenty, yes, more than twenty, years. Twenty years of London; twenty years of toil and hardship in big tyrannic London? Twenty years? Was he ever to succeed, ever have his due? Oh, confound that! He was there to have a good time of it, and, success or not, a good time he meant to have. . . . He liked Ireland. It was not the place of his dreams; no. Still, compare London with it. Think of a fog, and think of air such as that; compare the road he had walked with the greasy Strand, those hills, mountains, woods, the lake down there, the freshness, quietness of it all with London's square miles of roofs and belching chimneys, its ghastly rows of houses bordering interminable lengths of streets, its monstrous blocks of factories, schools, its mud, dirt, smoke! Still, he liked London, loved it almost; yes, give it its due, he did love it. Curious that elasticity of the human mind, that adaptability of the human himself. In a fortnight, perhaps a week, he might be weary of his uncle, be longing for his den again, his books, his moiling; might be hungering for a talk with old Rab, and a sight of his Marian. Marian? What an age it seemed since he saw her, an age crammed into the space of two nights and a day. Was she thinking of him just then, of their last talk, of their plans and promises? . . . What!—that long shrill cry? Oh, the ferryman no doubt.

Frank sprang from the bench, hurried from the shelter and turned towards the lake; there, at the end of the pier, saw waiting one of those shallow, flat-bottomed boats which in Ireland are called cots, and at the oars not a ferryman but a girl—a girl who sat with her feet crossed, body bent forward and elbows resting upon the oars.

Like that she sat, the while Frank, whistling softly to himself, and feeling the stress of the wind no longer, approached; sat quite still and watched him steadily as if seeing in him something novel or unexpected.

"Faith, and she's cool," muttered Frank; then, coming to the cot: "I'm for Garvagh," said he.

"Well," answered the girl, and pulling the handles of the oars from beneath the gunwales sat upright; "an' sure I was thinkin' that."

"You mean that you've answered the flag?" said Frank; "that you'll ferry me?"

"Surely. An' why not?"

"Ah!" Frank paused a moment on the heels of the word. "And I—what am I to do?"

"Well," answered the girl, with a smile, "I dunno; but usually people sit there;" and she nodded towards the end of the cot.

"Yes?" said Frank. "I see. But—but I'd rather row. I'm not used to the honour of being ferried—I'd really like to row."

"Indeed an' so ye can," came back, "if you'll only jump in. But wait," said the girl, and crossing the oars again ran their handles beneath the gunwales; "wait till I pull the flag down. I'll not be a minute,"

And before Frank could offer his services, she was out of the cot and running up the pier.

He turned and watched her. She was of middle height and very upright. Her shoulders were broad, her head well poised; and she ran with the freedom and grace of a deer. She wore a brown linsey skirt, made quite simply, and not long enough to hide her heavy boots; an old discoloured jacket, too short in the sleeves and too long in the waist; a woollen scarf round her neck; and over her hair, which was gathered behind into a coarse black net, a man's tweed cap.

She was gone maybe a minute; and at sight of her running back along the pier, Frank stepped into the cot, turned and with outstretched hand awaited her coming.

"Allow me," he said.

The girl stopped; looked at his hand, then at his face, then again at his hand.

"What?" said she, and met his eyes.

"Allow me to help you in," said Frank; but the girl flushed crimson.

"Ah, not at all; sure I'm young yet, thank God," said she; then sprang into the cot and catching up a pole fixed it in the stones of the pier. "Would ye be mindin'," she called over her shoulder, even as Frank dropped his hand and turned to stare after her; "would ye be mindin' to step this way a bit till I shove off?"

"Oh, certainly," said Frank in his suavest voice. "Certainly." He turned, took a step or two; the next minute felt the cot slip away beneath his feet, clutched wildly at the air and fell on his back.

It was ignominious ; and below his breath Frank swore. He sat up, gripping the gunwales with both hands.

" Why—why the deuce didn't you warn me ? " he called.

The girl turned and over her shoulder looked down at him ; and seeing him, burst into laughter.

" Aw, Lord," she said. " Aw, Lord, Lord. Sure I didn't know. Sure I thought ye were used to boats. Sure. . . . " Her laughter died away all suddenly. She pulled in the pole and came over the crutches towards Frank. " Mebbe you're hurt ? " said she. " Are ye ? " she said again and stooped.

" No," said Frank ; " not physically hurt."

" An' how then ? "

" I think you very cruel."

" Is it for laughin' ? Och no. Aw, it isn't cruelty. Sure I was only—sure I couldn't help it. Sure we always laugh when any one falls like that. Aw, it wasn't cruelty," she affirmed pleadingly ; then put out her hand. " Come, let me help ye up. You're sure, now, you're not hurt ? "

" I'm quite sure," answered Frank.

" An' ye don't mind the laughin' ? "

" Not a bit."

" Aw, that's good, that's good," said the girl ; and without more ado turned to her oar.

Now, Frank Barry was no waterman ; and, though he tried hard to hide his ignorance under a fine show of vigour, and excused his bungling on the score of want of practice, fifty strokes of his were quite enough to convince him that, however well he might acquit himself on the wild reaches of the Serpentine, neither

vigour nor excuses were of much avail against the stern onset of a pitiless Nor'easter. It was ignominious again, but not to be helped ; so, relinquishing his oar to the girl, he stepped to the end of the cot, sat down and fell to studying the horizon. "Dern it," he kept muttering to himself, "dern the thing ;" after a while, his natural good temper asserting itself again, turned his eyes and looked up at the girl.

With the handles of the sweeps crossed, her hands well apart and one higher than the other, her feet forward and pressed against a crutch, she was pulling strongly and steadily, each stroke long, hard and well finished, the swing slow and regular, and every dip of the oars directed not so much to make headway as to keep the cot from drifting before the stress of the wind. The task was no light one, for the water was rough and the cot so shallow that continually it was trying to slew ; but so skilful was she and so strong, that only a slight flushing of the cheeks and a compressing of the lips betrayed her exertions.

Presently, however, she rested on her oars for a moment, quickly threw open the front of her jacket, tucked up her sleeves and gave a tilt to her cap. And just then Frank had his first long look at her face.

It was oval in shape, very broad of the brow and cheeks, and curving down to a narrow chin. Her eyes were set well apart and were very dark. Her complexion was the rose and white of a child, and her hair fell away from her forehead in shining black waves. It was not a beautiful face, nor was it strong of feature or striking in outline ; but it was a face to be remembered, if only for its look of frankness, its expression of sweetness and simplicity, its noble width

of brow and glorious mingling of the hues of health and youth on lip and cheek.

For a while, Frank Barry sat looking at the girl and her face, perhaps contrasting both with another girl and another face of his knowing; then leant towards her.

"You row well," said he.

She glanced at him; then fixed her eyes on the point of her windward oar.

"An' so I ought," she answered, "for they say that practice makes perfect."

"You have a deal of practice, then?"

"Plenty; too much sometimes." Her voice was low and rich, beautifully modulated, Frank thought, and delightfully flavoured with the brogue. "Other times I get less," said she; "but I can never complain."

"Yes," said Frank. "But surely you don't do all the ferrying yourself?"

"Ah, no, but I do some of it."

"And the remainder?"

"Ah, there's father an' mother, an' between us all we manage. On market days we all turn out; but other times it's just the one of us that sees the flag."

"And suppose no one saw it?" asked Frank, more for the sake of hearing her voice than for the sake of her answer.

"How could that be?" Again the girl glanced at him. "Sure, we're none of us blind." The answer was plain, but not rudely given; and Frank kept on.

"Ah, yes. But you see a flag is a very small thing. To-day of course the wind kept it streaming at full

length; but suppose the day was dead calm and a slight mist abroad, and suppose Inishrath island were two miles off. . . .”

“But it isn’t,” interrupted the girl, “for there it is;” and she looked towards the island which lies almost between shore and shore, and which just then the cot was passing. Frank looked at it; then at the girl, and laughed.

“I’m afraid I’m a noodle,” said he.

“Ah, no,” said she, and laughed also; “ah, no—only a stranger. Sure, we all make mistakes.”

“And noodles create them,” said Frank. “But come, now,” he went on, “have pity upon me for the rest of this voyage. We’ve broken the ice at last; now be kind and tell me something about yourself—your name and anything else you like. Come; and I promise to do as much for you.”

Again the girl took her eyes from the white cottage which stood among the trees on the slope of Inishrath island, and looked down at Frank.

“Me name?” said she. “Sure, that’s an easy matter when it’s just plain Nan Butler.”

“Ah. Nan Butler; just plain Nan Butler.” Frank gave her a quick look. “Would you be very cross with me if I called you just Nan, plain Nan and nothing else?” said he, and for his impertinence expected the saucy answer of a suburban miss. But Nan only eyed him wonderingly.

“Cross?” repeated she. “Arrah, what for?”

Frank smiled.

“Oh,” he said, “I only asked. I didn’t know. I may call you Nan then?”

“Well, indeed you may, an’ welcome. Ivery one

else does—an' why not you? But tell me now," said Nan; "for faith I'm dyin' to know, who are ye at all, at all?"

"You're dying to know?" Frank cocked his head.

"Faith, an' I just am."

"And why?"

"Why? Ah, just because I'm curious; just because the face of a stranger's as rare these parts as a full moon."

"Oh! It's not for myself you want to know then?"

"For yourself?" said Nan, again with that look of surprise. "Arrah, how could that be when I don't know ye?"

Frank gave in. Flirtation clearly was an unknown quantity with this lough-side maiden.

"My name is Barry," he said, "Frank Barry."

Nan hung on her oars.

"Barry?" cried she. "Barry. A relation, is it, of ould Hugh's of Ryfield?"

"His nephew."

Nan dipped her oars and rowed on.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," she said plaintively, "to think o' that, to think o' me bein' all this time findin' out! An' you're all the way from London?" asked she.

"All the way—the weary way."

"An' you're the son o' Mr. George that left these parts years an' years ago?"

"Yes, Nan."

"An' you're goin' to the uncle's?"

"Yes, Nan."

"An' he doesn't expect ye? An' so there's no one to meet ye?"

"Quite right, Nan."

With her eyes on the point of an oar, Nan sat silent for a while; then:

"Aw, dear, oh, dear," she mused: "to think o' that, now—to think o' that!" Suddenly she looked at Frank.

"Why, sir, it's no stranger ye are after all?"

Frank laughed.

"And what then, Nan?"

"Aw, sure the son of a Barry's as welcome these parts as a spring day. Sure every one'll remember ye. Aw, but father'll be glad to see ye, for it's often I've heard him tell o' ye. Often an' often."

They were nearing the Garvagh side; and Frank was sorry.

"So you think every one will be glad to see me?" he asked.

"Think? I'm certain sure of it."

"And you're glad, Nan?"

Frankly she looked at him.

"Glad? Why to be sure I am. Is it you? One of our own, back again after all these years? Why to be sure. Easy, sir," cried Nan, as the cot swung around to the landing place; "easy, till she takes the quay. . . . There now, an' glad I am to see ye, Mr. Barry."

Frank rose.

"So it's like old friends we are after all;" he said, plucking at the fingers of his gloves.

Nan laughed softly.

"Faith it seems so," said she.

"And I'll see you again?"

"'Deed, then, I hope so," answered Nan, and quite unwittingly evaded the meshes of Frank Barry's subtlety; "for if ye don't it's fair mad father'll be. Sure when I tell him you're here he'll be dancin' to see ye. Good-bye to ye, sir; good-bye. Ah, no," said she, pleadingly, as Frank came down the cot with the ferry money in his palm. "Ah no, I couldn't take it. Is it from you? Don't ask me now. Don't."

"Well, then, shake hands, Nan."

"Aw, sure an' I will."

"And you'll let me hope to return your kindness, some day, won't you?" said Frank, Nan's hand in his.

"Aw, mebbe. Some day, mebbe."

Frank turned, walked down the cot and out upon the pier. Nan dipped her oars, pulled hard, and the cot glided off.

"Good-bye to ye, sir," she called; "good-bye, an' mind we'll be watchin' for ye."

"It's *au revoir* then, Nan." Frank waved his hand. "It's *au revoir*."

CHAPTER II.

FOR a while Frank Barry, on the wind-swept pier, stood looking after Nan ; then turned, and with his head down, went up the Garvagh road.

The way ran through an oak plantation; on between tall hedges and wide ditches, past cottages and pastures. On this side stood the mountains, on that the rounded hills. Below the gloomy sky lay a great grey-washed prospect; and through it went Frank Barry, along the broad white road, looking neither here nor there, and giving no heed to aught but the loose stones at his feet.

He felt pleased with himself, did Frank, glad he had come to this old distressful country. Something of a hero he felt as he walked; something of a throneless king, exiled through many years and now coming back to his own. "Sure the son of a Barry is as welcome these parts as a spring day." The words still rang in his ears; they pleased him. To think that people were waiting to welcome him, to make a hero of him—and all because he was a Barry, the son of his father, because he was himself! He had expected to be forgotten, gone out of sight and mind like an old tombstone. But no. All those years of his absence, people had been talking of his father, of him, keeping his memory green; keeping warm for him a welcome back that should be glorious as a spring day. Ah, he

liked these faithful Irish hearts ; so little they had in common with the phlegmatic English. He thanked heaven he was an Irishman, with the mad old blood of the Celts coursing in his veins. His soul, his patriotic soul, was burning with fine patriotism. He liked Ireland ; loved its people. . . . That Nan, now. There was your true Irish colleen. What a face she had, so sweet and regular ; what honest eyes, what frankness of manner ; what a colour of health on the tender bloom of her skin. How her native graces killed the rusticty of her ways, speech, garb ; and what simplicity of character. As natural as a flower she was, and as simple ; as sweet and fresh as the heather. Decidedly he liked Nan Butler. If girls such as she were plentiful among these barren hills, then diversion and he were likely to meet during the next week or so.

Suddenly Frank stopped short, wheeled about on the road and stood looking here and there across the hedges ; stood looking till his eye had singled out a white house standing some little way back among the firs on the crest of a hill. That was Ryfield. He knew it. In every way its appearance tallied with the description given him by the stationmaster at Lismahee ; without hesitation, then, he turned, came soon to a white gate, passed through it, and started along a lane that climbed laboriously through its lines of poplars and whitethorn hedges. On either hand, the fields spread out, clean, level, well-tended ; not a rush or whin took the eye ; here were troughs and hay-racks, there ploughs and harrows ; an orchard faced the south, within shelter of the firs lay the haggard, right in front was a range of offices, with the lane running at last between stone pillars into the farmyard.

A little way from the pillars was an iron gate ; through this Frank passed and along a gravelled path which ended soon at the porch of Ryfield house. He mounted the step and knocked on the oaken door ; then backed away a few paces and looked about him.

In front of the house was a lawn of about ten acres, planted at top with firs and beeches and bounded by the lane hedge and a wire fence. On the right was a kitchen garden set with fruit trees ; on the left a tumbled rockery, an empty flower bed and a narrow paddock. The house itself was square, plain, high, and whitewashed ; set with tall windows and a narrow door : a serviceable building and an ugly ; yes, thought Frank Barry, almost ferociously ugly. The whole place was unattractive ; had a sombre look, a prosaic air, that, somehow, hardly appealed to his fanciful eye. It looked prosperous, healthful ; still, thought he, was it a likely place of sojourn for one of his susceptibilities ? A whole six weeks or so, could he spend them just there ? He shrugged his shoulders ; then, wondering why no one came, turned and knocked again. And, even whilst his hand was raised, a foot sounded within, a bolt shot back, the door creaked open, and his uncle Hugh stood before him.

A big man he was, muscular, slightly stooped ; his face large, square, florid, his mouth wide and firm, his eyebrows bushy, his brow beetling and wrinkled. He wore a loose suit of brown tweed, brown leggings and nailed boots. His spectacles were pushed up his forehead ; round his neck was a knotted black scarf ; a chain of white metal hung

across his waistcoat; in his left hand a large Bible was closed over his thumb.

Hugh looked steadily at Frank for a moment; then jerked back his shoulders.

"Well," said he, in a strong full voice.

Frank stepped forward; smiled, put out his hand.

"Don't you know me?" he said. Hugh pursed his lips, pulled down his spectacles, peered hard. "Don't you know me, uncle Hugh?"

"Eh?" said the old man, sharply. "What's that?"

"I'm your nephew, Frank—come from London to see you."

A light of recognition flashed in old Hugh's eyes; he made a stride forward and shot out his hand.

"Frank," he said; "Frank from London? Ah, I knew ye for a Barry; I knew ye but I wasn't sure. But come in, me boy; come in. Wait now." He closed the door and shot the bolt. "Wait now. Why, who'd ha' thought? Here, this way, this way," he called and led Frank through the hall up into a large parlour.

A well-worn carpet was on the floor; the walls were whitewashed and hung with prints in walnut frames; stout haircloth chairs and a couple of arm-chairs stood here and there; in the corner was an upright desk, and beside it whips, sticks, guns, fishing rods; a clear fire of peat burned in the grate; on the table stood a tray bearing an empty cup and saucer, part of a soda cake and a plate of butter.

Old Hugh shut the door, laid his Bible on the table, took Frank by the arm and led him to the window.

"Let me look at ye," he said, "let me see if you're

a real Barry." Long and steadily he made his survey; at last stood back at arm's length and shook Frank roughly. "Why," he said, "you're not half a Barry—not half. Your skin's like a woman's; there's no flesh on ye; you're soft, sir, flabby as fresh fish. Why, your mother was a better man than ye—ay, it's after her ye take your good looks." Frank stood flushing and biting his lip; again old Hugh shook him to and fro. "An' why don't ye hold up, sir, instead o' slouchin' like a beggarman? Come; straighten your back. That's right," said Hugh, as Frank, for a moment, got rid of his student's stoop; "that's right. An' now look me in the eyes. Ay, ay; you'll do. You're honest, Frank Barry, an' that's the great thing. Ay, that's the great thing," repeated the old man, then, much to Frank's relief, turned away, walked to the fire, sat down, leant back in his big chair and clasped his hands before him. "Ay, that's the great thing," he kept on. "But sit ye down, Frank Barry; sit ye down. An' why don't ye take off that coat? Take it off, man."

Frank walked to the table, laid his hat on a chair, and unbuttoned his ulster. The flush born of his uncle's survey had died away from his face; and now about the corners of his mouth, and in his eyes, hovered the wraith of a smile.

"Yes, uncle," said he, and the smile widened. "But I do wish you had waited a while before taking stock of me. Man, I'm just famished. I haven't eaten a bite since yesterday."

Up shot Hugh from his chair.

"Hungry?" said he. "God bless my heart, of course ye are. Tut, tut." He crossed the room and

opened the door. "Sally," he called. "I say, Sally; are ye there? Well, boil eggs—plenty of them; and fry some of that ham—lots of it; an' make toast, an' tay; and bring a tablecloth and the best things; an' be quick, Sally. Ye hear me? It's all I've got, my boy," said Hugh, closing the door and turning again to his chair; "but such as it is there'll be plenty, an' you're welcome to it, Frank, very welcome." He sat down. "An' now tell me how ye are, and how the world's using ye."

Frank was pretty well, he thanked his uncle, pretty well; no better and no worse than one expects of the average Londoner.

"Ay, ay," said Hugh; "well enough for a Londoner. Yes. Wi' your lungs like a chimney, an' not a sound tooth in ye, I warrant. London? Aw, I know it. A big unholy stink-pot—that's London."

Frank sat back in his chair, and smilingly took note of this uncle of his. An interesting old boy he seemed to be, an uncommonly interesting old boy.

"Well," said he, "we won't quarrel there. But how are you, uncle Hugh?"

Hugh turned his head.

"I? How am I? ye ask. How d'ye think I ought to be?" he questioned. "How d'ye think *you'd* be, livin' here on the side of a hill without chick or child of your own, an' wi' only a lump of a girl to care for ye? Eh?"

"I'm afraid," said Frank, with a shake of his head; "I'm afraid I'd soon get rid of my sooty lungs. I'd die most assuredly."

"Ay, ye'd die," came back, with a scornful snort;

"faith would ye. But I don't die. No. Look at me. I'm up at six every morning; in the summer four o'clock doesn't see me in bed most times. Wet or fine, every day I make the round o' the land before I taste meat. I'm not in the house, barrin' meal-times, from sunrise to sunset. I'm nearer seventy nor sixty, an' I could ride from here to Lismahee, or walk or run. Ye hear me? Or run, I say? Is that like dyin'?"

"No, uncle."

"You'd die, of course," old Hugh went on, shooting out a forefinger; "because that's the kind o' ye. You're soft and womanish, like your father before ye. But I'm not that kind. No. Ye wouldn't find me shut up in any stink-pots; ye wouldn't find me thrivin' on soot an' watered milk an' foreign beef; ye wouldn't find me makin' the choice your father made an' goin' from my liberty, my fresh air and. . . . Ah, but I strove sore to keep him," said Hugh, sinking back in his chair and dropping his white head; "hard I strove. But go he'd go; an' now—now he's dead an' gone. Ay, sirs. Ah, poor George, poor George," moaned Hugh, with a sudden fall in his voice. "Ye died soon. My poor boy." He looked up at a portrait which hung over the mantelpiece—a faded photograph in a gilded frame. "There ye are," said Hugh. "There ye are, George. An' it's dead ye are."

For a while the old man sat looking up at the portrait; then, all at once, turned to Frank.

"You're like him," said he. "You're like him; an' I wouldn't wonder—Tell me," he asked abruptly. "Do ye drink, Frank Barry?"

"No," said Frank, looking full at his uncle. "No," said he.

"Well, thank God for that." Hugh sat back in his chair. "Thank God for that." And before more could be said, in came Sally with cloth and tray.

She was a middle-aged woman—for all that Hugh had called her a girl—short, stout, ugly, snub-nosed, yellow of skin, gifted with a perpetual sniff and a habit of peering short-sightedly at things from the tail of her eye. She spread the cloth, scattered the tea things about; was just about to lift a dish of ham from the tray, when said old Hugh :

"Don't ye know who this is, Sally?"

Hard Sally peered at Frank; sniffed and peered, peered and sniffed; at last shook her head.

"Well, sir, not a know I know."

"Phat, woman. Get your specs. Don't ye remember Mr. George?"

"Mr. George, sir? But sure—but sure—."

"That's his son sittin' there—Master Frank."

"Master Frank?" cried Sally. "Master Frank? Mr. George's son?" Quickly she put down the dish, rushed at Frank and clutched his hand. "Why, sir; why, sir! Aw, but I'm glad to see ye. Welcim back, sir, welcim back to the ould country. Aw, the spit o' your father ye are. An' me not to know ye! Aw, welcim back, sir, welcim back. An' me nursed ye, an' minds ye a gossoon in skirts, an'—Aw, welcim back," cried Sally, and ceaselessly shook Frank's hand up and down. "An' how long are ye goin' to stay? An' how are ye? An' welcim back."

It was becoming embarrassing for Frank, pleased though he was at this quick confirmation of Nan

Butler's words ; mighty glad was he when, at last, old Hugh rose, took Sally by the shoulders and turned her towards the door.

"Here, Sally ; that's enough bleather for once in a way. Be quiet, woman. Don't ye see Mr. Frank's half starved? Not a word, I say." Hugh closed the door on Sally and turned towards his chair. "Dear me, dear me," he said, "the wheedlers these women are—the scandalous wheedlers." He sat down and pursed his lips. "Ay, it's wonderful the eye they have for the people that want them. 'Twas always the way—always. A Barry had only to show his face an' wag his finger to bring them flockin' to his feet like crows."

Frank looked up from his plate.

"Indeed?" said he.

"It's been the curse of us," mused Hugh ; "the curse of us."

"Indeed?" said Frank again.

"Ay, indeed," answered Hugh, taking up his Book. "But go on wi' your supper, Frank ; maybe we'd have a chat when you're done. Where was I, now? Yes, yes. The tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, the tenth chapter. . . ." And sitting back in his chair, his Bible on his knees, his finger following his eye over the page and his lips mumbling, old Hugh went on with his reading.

Frank sat in front of the fire and in full view of his father's portrait ; and, as he ate, his eye kept wandering up and down, down and up, between the living face bending over the Bible and the dead face there on the wall. Between the two he could trace few points of resemblance. The one was strong,

rough ; the other showed small, refined, almost weak. His uncle's was the face of a man of action, of powerful will, of large but untutored intellect ; in his father's he could see gentleness, culture, a refinement both of character and mind. Yes, and such a man clearly was old Hugh ; and such a man, he knew, had been his father. . . . Ah, if only he had lived, lived to reap some reward of his labours ! But London killed him before his time. His face was older than that, older and much sadder, before he died. No wonder either. He was a young man the day he left his village school and went to Dublin ; he was a young man when, three years afterwards, he went tracking fortune to London ; he was an old man, five years later on, as he lay dying out in the wilds of Camberwell. Eight years of drudgery, five years of grim striving on the slippery ladder of journalism, five years in the harness of a hack, had done that ; aged him, killed him. Yet he must have been happy, thought Frank, happy even as his son, despite all, was happy in his drudging. Ah, the curious mortals these men of letters were ! Yes ; he was his father's son. He had his cast of face, he knew he had ; he had some of his father's abilities, sympathies, in point of character they were much alike. And one had failed—and died ; and the other ? Yes, thought Frank, and, his meal being over, leant back in his chair ; what of the other, even of himself, Frank Barry ? Ah, that was the question of questions, thought he ; then, as was his wont when thought grew troublesome, rose and went for his pipe.

The smell of tobacco roused old Hugh. He put down his Bible, brought forth a black cutty and

lighted it with a coal. Sally came in and cleared the table—not without fresh shouts of welcome for Frank, either; lit the lamp, pulled down the blind, and put fresh turf on the fire. Frank went round the table, drew over an armchair, sat down and stretched his legs towards the blaze. He felt satisfied, comfortable, in good humour. There were worse places than Ireland, he said to himself, and few anywhere more cosy than Ryfield parlour.

All at once Hugh turned.

“I’m glad to see ye in that chair, Frank,” said he, his eyes lightening as he spoke. “Ye fill it well.”

“Thank you, uncle,” said Frank, and answered Hugh’s look with a smile; “thank you, and may I never see you fill your own chair worse.”

“Ay, ay.” Again Hugh looked at Frank. “Ye like your ease, I see.”

“Well, yes. I like it; and when I can I take it.”

“An’ you’re fond o’ the pipe,” Hugh went on, still with his eyes on Frank.

“I am; fond and faithful.”

“I know.” Hugh paused. “Ye said, I believe, that ye didn’t drink?”

“I said so,” replied Frank, a little stiffly. “Why ask me again?”

“It’s a curse,” cried Hugh; “a curse. It’s ruined more men o’ my knowin’ than’d fill a churchyard. Keep from it,” he cried, and glanced up at the portrait, “as ye’d keep from the plague. It’s a curse.”

Frank sat silent. He set up for no saint; his uncle was right no doubt; still he resented this suspicious questioning.

“It’s a curse,” repeated the old man; “a curse.

Drink and the false smiles o' women, there's what the Barrys had always to fear. Keep from them, Frank; keep from them. Ah, George, George," said he, and again looked up at the portrait. "Only for them you'd ha' been alive now, me son. Women and drink, they killed ye, George; they killed ye."

Frank pulled in his legs and bent forward.

"I wish you'd explain, uncle Hugh," said he. "I don't know what you mean. I know what you mean by—What women do you refer to?"

"Mean?" Hugh looked at Frank over his shoulder. "I mean this: that from your father was the height of a cart-wheel he'd drink whiskey wi' all the world, an' he'd go ten miles to see a girl. That's what I mean. He was clever—ay, cleverer than the lot of us together, but he had that weak jaw o' yours, an' always a woman could wheedle him. He had no backbone; no grit; he was a fly-away, a gad-about. Nothin' would satisfy him. Give him the sun, and he'd want the moon. He squandered his wits, scattered his brains, killed the poor life in him. He married at twenty, an' he repented at twenty-one. No sooner was he settled here than off he goes to Dublin; he wasn't in Dublin till his eyes were turned to London. An' to London he went. Ay. That was the end of him; big, dirty London finished him. . . . An' now he's gone; an' Tom's lyin' dead in the States; an' Henry's a corpse in Australia; an' Fred's lyin' over there in Derryhill churchyard: all gone," mused Hugh; "all gone. An' with all," said he, in a while, "with all 'twas the same—wheedlin' and drink, wheedlin' an' drink."

Frank leant back in his chair.

"For all that," said he, "I think you'll admit that my father was a very good fellow. He is not forgotten even now, I think, in these parts."

"He was a danged sight too good a fellow, Frank Barry," said Hugh sharply; "a danged sight." And to that Frank did not reply.

There came a short silence: then, once more, Hugh turned in his abrupt way.

"You'll have a girl in London, I warrant?" said he.

"I have," answered Frank, shortly.

"Ay? I thought so. I thought so. You wouldn't be a Barry if ye hadn't. Maybe it's married ye are?"

"No."

"H'm. Not yet; not yet. An' what might be her name?"

"Marian."

"Marian what?"

"Marian Dent.

"Ay. Marian Dent; Marian Dent. Just so," mumbled Hugh and wagged his chin up and down.

Frank was getting used to his uncle's manner, beginning even to find it amusing. He was a character evidently, was this old Hugh; a man worth humouring; a rich harvest maybe, for the sickle of your cunning man of letters. He seemed a wise old fellow, if a crotchety; he was delightfully unconventional; his talk bristled with the unexpected; he was rough, perhaps a little rude: yes, he was worthy the studying. To the studying then fell Frank, a fresh pipe going smoothly, and himself in the depths of an easy-chair.

For a while Hugh sat mumbling to himself; all at

once straightened his shoulders, put a fresh coal in his pipe, and turned again to Frank.

"An' what brought ye over?" he asked.

"To Ireland, you mean, uncle?"

"I do."

"Well, I came in a steamer, uncle——"

"Come, come, sir," shouted Hugh, "none o' this foolery. I hate jests. Come, answer me."

Frank answered softly:

"Well, I came to see you, uncle Hugh."

The fire died in the old man's eyes.

"To see me?" he said. "Is that true, Frank? It is. Well, God bless ye for it; an' it's glad I am to see ye. Ay; mighty glad I am. An'—but ye came for somethin' besides that, maybe?" asked Hugh of a sudden.

Frank was in a difficulty. He had told only half the truth. He did not wish to hurt the old man's feelings, could not withdraw his words, had no wish to commit himself further; he evaded the difficulty by saying that wherever he went, even when seeing a friend, he always carried his work with him. He and his work were twins, inseparables, each ever and always in and for the other. Hugh looked at him.

"Ay?" said he. "An' what may this great work o' yours be, may I ask?"

"I write," answered Frank, not humbly. "My work is literature."

"Write? Write? An' what d'ye write?"

Frank shifted nervously in his chair; made answer that he wrote many things: articles for the newspapers, stories for the magazines, a little verse, occasional paragraphs, many and various things.

"An' that's how ye earn your livin'?" asked Hugh.

"That's how," answered Frank.

"Scribblin' your wits away for the papers?"

"If you like to put it like that."

Hugh raised his hands, and brought them down heavily on the arms of his chair.

"Ah, you're your father's son, Frank Barry," he cried; "your father's son. My God, hadn't ye his example? Scribblin' your wits away! An' that's all ye do?"

"That's all. Is it not enough?" asked Frank, and smiled in his superior way.

"Enough? Too much, be the Lord! An' ye mean to keep at it?"

"Please God."

Again Hugh raised his hands. His thoughts were beyond words.

"An' what, may I ask, will ye find in these parts to scribble about?" he asked, after a pause.

Again Frank shifted uneasily; replied that he meant to write a novel, that he was seeking material therefor, that he hoped to find it in plenty in dear old Ireland.

Hugh groaned.

"A novel?" he mumbled. "A novel! A bundle of lies, a kill-time for women and children. Lord, Lord!" he said; then quickly swung round in his chair and crashed his hand down on the Bible. "Let me tell ye this, Frank Barry," he said, bending his brows on the young man, "an' may it do ye good: All the writin' the world wants was done long ago, and all the readin' the world wants is there." He slapped the Bible. "I'm an old man,

an' comin' near me grave ; I've lived most o' me life an' I've had me share of its experience : an' here I am tellin' ye that all ye can't find in these pages is stuff an' nonsense, sir ; wind and bleather, sir. I never thought of anything I couldn't find there, an' I never wanted anything I couldn't find in it : it's the one Book in the world, and the only one there'll ever be. I've read it every day these fifty years ; an' yet I don't know it. I never open it but I find something new. It's the one Book in the world, I tell ye : an' yet you, you'd write another, an' fools like you are always writin' them, an' other fools always readin' them ! An' what better are you or they, I ask ye, for all your nonsense ? ”

“ Very little,” answered Frank. “ Really, uncle, I don't disagree with you.”

“ Disagree ? Then why do you do it ? Why do ye addle your brains wi' such stuff ? Tell me this, Frank Barry,” said Hugh, leaning forward in his chair. “ How often do ye read your Bible ? ”

The look of amusement which Hugh's outburst had brought died away in Frank's eyes ; nervously he crossed and uncrossed his legs.

“ Answer me, sir.”

“ Well, honestly, uncle, I fear not very often.”

“ Ah, I thought so ; I thought so. An' how many other books would ye read in the year, now ? ”

“ Really I don't know ; perhaps hundreds.”

“ Hundreds,” cried Hugh, throwing up his hands. “ Hundreds ! ” It was too much. For a while he sat pondering and mumbling ; then slowly turned, took up his Bible, and pulled down his spectacles. “ It's time for bed,” said he ; “ but I'll read ye somethin' ”

before ye go. It's a story I have a likin' for ; an' maybe ye never heard it, and maybe it may tell ye somethin'. Ay, ay." He turned the pages ; presently drew over the lamp, and from the Gospel according to St. Luke began reading the parable of the Prodigal Son. Slowly, emphatically he read, as though weighing each word ; clearly his voice rang through the room ; steadily his fingers followed the words along and down the page ; ceaselessly his white head moved in rhythm with the sounding sentences. At last he finished ; closed the book, folded his spectacles, slowly rose. " I always think that a grand parable," he said ; " a grand parable. It's all truth, it's powerful human ; an' one needn't be past sixty to be able to apply it." He held out his hand. " Good-night, Frank, an' God bless ye, my son."

CHAPTER III.

FOR a couple of hours, maybe, after the time of Hugh's going, Frank sat warming his thoughts in the glow of the peat fire ; at last, finding his eyelids heavy, rose, lighted the candle, blew out the lamp, and started for bed. The hall was in darkness ; his steps rang on the flags ; uncannily harsh came the shrilling of crickets from the kitchen hearth ; the white steps of the stairs creaked and started beneath his feet ; solemnly the clock on the landing ticked out the flying hours : with his candle raised, Frank hastened along the corridor, escaping, so you might think, from the silence and the ghosts.

Deep among the feathers in the mahogany four-poster, he slept well and long ; woke at last in the fullness of the morning light. Across the bed-foot the sunshine fell golden ; through the open window the air streamed wholesome ; the house hummed with work and hurry ; outside the cattle were lowing, the pigs squealing, the cocks tossing their shrill notes to the sky.

For a while Frank lay staring at the ceiling, thinking of Nan and her oval face, of Hugh and the exploits of the Prodigal ; then fell to reading the texts on the wall, then to admiring the simplicity and cleanliness of his room—the shining plaster walls, the white floor with its strip of carpet, the wondrous

patchwork counterpane, the spotless curtains, blinds, linen ; at last, nine o'clock sounding from the clock on the landing, sprang out, dressed quickly and hastened downstairs.

At the parlour door he paused ; turned to the left and into the kitchen. On the hearth burned a great fire below a row of pots and kettles. Here and there about the cement floor were stools, painted chairs, chests, a large deal table, a high dresser shining in its array of tin and crockery ware ; on the smoke-browned walls hung harness, guns, whips, hay twist-ers, shears, sieves, almanacs ; in the chimney corner were shelves laden with medicine bottles, ointment jars, physic tins ; from the rafters hung flitches, hams, strings of onions, dried fish, bundles of herbs. And there by the dresser, her skirts tucked up, arms bare to the elbows, face shining with health and work, stood Sally crashing the heavy beetle into a tub of steaming potatoes.

At sight of Frank, Sally turned, let fall her beetle and volubly gave forth her morning greetings. Aw, the height of the morning to him ; aw, but he was like his father ; aw, but she hoped he had slept ; aw, but he was welcome to the ould country ; and aw, but he must be dying for his breakfast. So Sally rattled on, and smilingly Frank, with his back to the fire and his legs spread, listened to it all ; smilingly, after a while, followed Sally and her tray up into the parlour. And there the firelight was dancing on the walls ; the table drawn close to the hearth, spread with a snow-white cloth and set with flowered china and gleaming cutlery, with fresh soda cakes, crisp oaten bread, with jam and marmalade ; and in the

fender Frank's boots lay a-warming; and in the corner smoking-chair and paper awaited his pleasure; and, last and best, on his plate lay a letter from Marian.

And at sight of it all Frank's impressionable soul swells glad within him. He rubs his hands. "Why, Sally," says he; "this is mighty good; this is a real home-coming. Good luck to you, my girl." And Sally, flushing through her wrinkles, looks up admiringly, hopes God may bless Mr. Frank, wishes him a good appetite and all to his liking; then backs to the door and leaves him to his letter and his breakfast.

Frank took the letter from his plate; tore it open, and standing with his back to the fire, read it through. He seemed very content. Now and again he murmured a sentence, repeating it softly and caressingly; now looked towards the window, a tender light shining in his eyes: at last, carried his letter to the table, propped it against the teapot, and, as he ate, read and read it again. "Dear Maid Marian," he said; presently took from his pocket-book a photograph and stood it by the letter. "Dear Maid Marian," said Frank; and as he looked his face was radiant.

He finished his breakfast, put the letter away, and with the photograph in his hand, sat him down before the fire. He felt homesick, call it lovesick. He wished he could see Marian, just for a while. Ah, he liked her so well. Ah, how the lovelight shone in her eyes that minute of the parting; how vividly he remembered her face, that living face, set in curls, firm, steadfast, beautiful, lighted with a pair of blue eyes! "Dear Marian," said Frank, "dear Maid Marian;" so sat lost in reverie, nor moved till

the sound of old Hugh's voice came ringing from the hall.

Hastily he put away the portrait, rose and met Hugh at the door.

"The top o' the morning to you, uncle."

"Same to you, lad." Hugh came in, crossed and sat down. "Same to you. So you've got from the blankets at last. Why, you look better already. What is it? You look fresher, healthier. Ay, ye do."

Frank laughed. It was only the result of a good sleep, a good breakfast, he feared.

"Ah, maybe so. Ye slept well? That's right. And ye had a good breakfast, ye say?" Hugh glanced round at the table. "Why, heavenly hour, you've eaten nothin'. Ah, ye needn't talk; I know what was there before you began. An' now. . . . Here, Sally, Sally," roared the old man; then, as Sally came running in, rose and pointed scornfully at the table. "Look what's happened to your breakfast, Sally. One egg gone, one bit o' bacon, a piece of toast, a slice of bread, an'—Yes, I declare to heaven," said Hugh, raising the teapot, "it's nearly full." Sally threw up her hands. "Aw, Mr. Frank, Mr. Frank, dear," wailed she, "what ails ye at all, at all?" Frank, not daring to smile, stood shifting his weight from one leg to another. Hugh looked at the table for a moment; then wheeled round.

"Why, what kind of mortal are ye?" he asked. "Or what kind can your inside be? Is it spoon-meat they give ye in London, or what? Here; let me feel ye." He gripped Frank's biceps. "Lord, Lord," said he, "like butter they are." He ran his hand along Frank's legs. "Lord, Lord," he said,

"the spindles they are. Come, get on your boots, Frank Barry, an' come out till I make a man o' ye. Come out, I say; for, by the King, if ye don't eat your dinner like a man I'll stuff ye like a Christmas turkey. Come on." And, whether he liked it or no, out Frank went,

It was a bright morning, keen with the savour of an east wind, yet holding, nevertheless, a promise of spring. The air was clear, full, bracing. Far off the mountains stood out long and blue against the sky; the hills lay huddled about the valleys; nearer still were the familiar fields, rough and barren, small and irregular, set with whins, rushes, hedges, dotted with white homesteads. On the grass the frost still glistened. The peaceful sounds of country life—dogs yapping, cattle lowing, children shouting, carts clanking along the roads—came clearly. In the distance Lough Erne gleamed away between its wooded shores; gleamed like silver in the morning sun.

"Ye don't have views like that through London chimney-pots," said Hugh, stretching an arm across the paddock gate.

"Nor through many other chimney-pots," answered Frank; then turned and followed his uncle across the yard.

Beyond the yard were the outhouses; the byre full of store cattle, the dairy sweet and cool, the stables with their rattle of chains and stamping of hooves, the barn above the byre with its heaps of chaff, piles of straw, sacks of grain; through all these went Hugh, thumbs caught in his waistcoat pockets, hat back on his crown, his tongue busy with

explanation and comment. So much the cattle were worth, so much that roan horse cost, such and such was the pedigree of that short-horn bull; thus and so on. Behind the offices was an enclosed yard lined with sheds, tool houses, piggeries; beyond this lay the haggard, beyond that again, the orchard; through all these, Hugh, still talking, led Frank. Badly that yard wanted paving. Why did not Barney, dang the fellow, hurry and feed those pigs? Let Frank take a sniff of that old hay. Ah, 'twas prime sir, prime. And now let Frank turn up his trousers and come for a tramp.

So Frank started for his tramp; and, for a while, his going was not pleasant. His boots were thin, his clothes light, soon his feet were soaking, his trousers muddy to the knee. There was never a path, never a field that was not saturated. Up and down, here and there, through gaps and rushes, over hedges and ditches; oh, 'twas a weary tramp. And all this weary talk about things agricultural! What cared he whether such a field had been in turnips two years ago, or whether, with God's help, such a field would next year be ploughed for oats? How the deuce could he care, with his boots, his boots. . . . Oh, it was infernal!

For all that, Hugh was relentless. From field to field he went, from hill to hill; through rushes and clay and mud, tramped Hugh, splattering, grunting, puffing; at last, when about half the two hundred acres of Ryfield had been traversed, halted on the crest of a hill, and there seated himself on a stump.

"That's a good view," said he, and looked towards the lake.

"Yes," answered Frank, with his eyes on his boots. "I suppose it is."

"Suppose? It's a danged good view, that's what it is. D'ye see Lismahee away yonder? There's Louth Castle beyond in the trees. That's Bunn town you'll be seein' across the hills. They call that country Gorteen over there—Orange Gorteen. That's Inish-rath island below there between the ferries."

Frank looked up quickly.

"Indeed?" said he. "Where Nan—where Butler the ferryman lives?"

Hugh found Frank's eyes.

"An' what do you know about Nan Butler, may I ask?"

Again Frank looked at his boots.

"Oh—very little. She ferried me over yesterday. That's all."

"Ay. An' was the father with her?"

"No."

"Ay. Well, all the better. He's a windbag, a good-for-nothing, a cumberer of the earth. Bah! The name of him riles me. I want to talk no more about him," snapped Hugh; "about him or his. Them's a nice pair of boots o' yours," he went on. "'Twas in London they were made, I'm thinkin'."

"They were never made for such—such confounded usage as this," cried Frank. "They're ruined, simply ruined."

"They look it," answered Hugh. "An' your feet's wet?"

"Soaked."

"All the more reason we'd be movin'. Look here, my lad," said Hugh, rising and laying a hand on

Frank's shoulder. "I've been watchin' ye. I'm sorry your feet are wet : but the Lord made ye for a man. Try not to disappoint Him. Ye hear me ?"

"Yes," said Frank, shamefacedly. "Yes, I hear ;" and thereafter Frank strove his man's best.

True, his best was not brilliant ; still, he did strive, and as reward soon found enjoyment in his ramble and in his uncle's society. After all, he told himself, matters might have been worse. The scenery was good, the air excellent, the sun and wind exhilarating ; there was pleasure to be had even in boldly essaying noisome places, in jumping ditches and venturing awesome drains ; and, for the rest, was not old Hugh's talk delightful, and himself a man worthy of study and admiration.

Really, mused Frank, this uncle of his was a fine old fellow. See him there, striding along as sturdily as might a man of fifty, head erect, eye bright and quick as a child's, his face glowing with health and the bounty of the open air. How well he talked, too, so clearly and racily ; and how genuine was his pride in those fields of his, those flocks and herds. He looked a very king taking stock of his dominions. His eye revelled in all it saw ; he talked of his land as another might of his mistress ; his heart, one might say, was given to the fields.

Yes ; old Hugh was well worth the knowing, Frank thought. He was getting to understand him, to love him even. True, he was not Frank's kind, was his exact opposite indeed ; was somewhat uncouth, narrow, a man of affairs, of facts, a child of the soil ; one who would quote you the Bible this breath, and damn you the next, and hit you as quickly as he would do

either; a man also who cared not for books, and called authors fools. Yes; that was uncle Hugh. And Frank? Well, he was just the opposite of all that; was a child of the pen, a spinner of fancies, a bookish man, a man of mind. Yes. Still, were these inestimable qualities, call them superiorities just for the sake of contrast—were these to blind him, Frank Barry, to his uncle's virtues? No, no; that were to be crass indeed. On the contrary, did they not help him to a closer sight of these virtues; enable him pleurably to listen (as he then was listening) to Hugh's talk, to look at things almost with his eyes? Ah, yes. Such were the advantages of width, culture; such the light which beat on Hugh and showed him so splendid an old fellow—a plain, honest, sturdy man; a real man; one with the heart and mind of a child; one whose yea was yea, and nay nay, whom you could trust eternally. And this pride he had in his work, in his acres, this love for the inanimate fields, this delight in his freedom, health, vigour, this joy in the sun, and in the pure air of heaven—how these things ennobled the bounds of his narrowness and set him apart, set him far above the great throng of the workers of the earth! Here was your ideal worker; your ideal man, some might think. Often had Frank read of such, seen such lauded in speeches and leading articles as saviours of the country and pillars of the State; and there, there walking by his side, was one of these, this same old Hugh Barry.

Well, well, thought Frank and glanced at his uncle, just to think where his thoughts and his fancies had landed him. He shrugged his shoulders, smiled, muttered a word to himself. Round came Hugh's face.

"Eh?" said he. "What's that? What are ye grinnin' at, Frank?"

"Oh, merely smiling, uncle, at a thought I had."

"Ay. A thought indeed! That's a novelty with ye. An' what's your thought?"

"Just this: the honour I am at in walking with a pillar of the State."

Hugh snorted.

"Pillar of the State," shouted he. "Pillar of the State, be hanged! That's another o' your danged newspaper fooleries, another o' your sprats to catch whales. Here, stop your bleather; an' come till I show ye where I grew those turnips I was tellin' ye about. Come away."

So Frank, the blood now quick in his veins and his manhood assertive, strode on by his uncle's side, over the hills, along the valleys; came at last to the stretch of reclaimed bog land which lies in the hollow right below Ryfield House. And at sight of that Hugh's face beamed pridefully and his tongue waxed eloquent. There was the work of his life; the boast of his heart; the talk of the countryside. Handfuls of money he had scattered upon that. Ah, the drudging he had been at out there; the years he had spent. And now look at it: the best piece of land in all Ireland, and it taken every inch from the barren bog. He could grow more there than in the rest of Ryfield—turnips as big as creels, potatoes as large as turf, corn as tall as pitchforks. Ay, ay. He thanked God he had done that; it would do more for his memory than a marble tombstone. And at that Frank laughed.

"Why surely, uncle," said he; "it wasn't for the sake of your memory that you drugged?"

"Naw ; it wasn't. But every honest man strives to leave the world a little better than he found it : an' there's my share. May yours be no worse, Frank Barry," said Hugh, and strode again for the hills.

In a while they came to a field in which two labourers were digging. They were only simple souls, ragged and forlorn, but their welcome of Frank was something to make glad the heart of any man. Both remembered his father, his uncles, himself as a boy. They would have known him anywhere, they said ; and sure but it's glad they were to see him, and it's welcome back he was. One of them was the Ryfield herd, a man of about sixty ; and he once getting grip of Frank's hand could scarce let go. It was almost touching, his genuine pleasure ; it was a lesson in manners to see how tactfully he asked after Frank's welfare, nor showed his real concern that a Barry should turn out so poorly, such a crooked bundle of skin and bones, with, aw, such a woful face. And was Mr. Frank staying long ? Aw, only for a month or so ; sure that was no time at all. But, sure, maybe he couldn't spare longer, so busy he must be over in big London. Anyway, might the sun shine on him all the days he was in Ryfield ; " an' sure I hope, sir," said James, turning to Hugh, " ye'll be tellin' Sally to feed him o' the best."

" Oh, trust Sally for that, James," said Hugh, with a laugh ; " trust Sally for that."

" Sure, I know it," answered James ; " sure I know it well. Well, good-bye, Mr. Frank ; good-bye, sir, an' God bless ye. An' we'll, mebbe, be seein' more of ye ? "

"Indeed you will, James," said Frank, turning away. "Indeed, you will. And God bless you."

The two walked a little way; then said Frank:

"It was worth coming to Ireland," said he, "if only for that welcome."

"It was," said Hugh. "It was. An' ye took it well."

"Took it well, uncle? Of course I did."

"Ay. Well, some people wouldn't; an Englishman for one. He'd think it was impudence an' blarney, an' a thing to be taken with a curl of the lip. Ah, a big mistake, a big mistake. But you'll do, Frank, you'll do. I was watchin' ye, an' you've got the way wi' ye. Yes. But mind this, me son: always thank God for an Irish welcome, but pray God ye may never play it false. That's it, Frank; that's it."

CHAPTER IV.

THE remainder of that day slipped slowly and unimportantly away. Frank ate a good dinner; bent, all the afternoon, over the many pages writ in his crabbed mode of penmanship and his fluent habit of style, of a letter inscribed to his dearest Maid Marian; did justice at tea to Sally's boxty pancakes, and thereafter till bedtime sat flushed and repentant before the parlour fire.

So that day passed; and the second was like unto it. The third was wet and forlorn. The fourth came and found Frank somewhat tired of the life at Ryfield. Over and over he had tramped the fields, and he was weary of them. Day after day, he had heard the same discourse from his uncle, the same voluble reminiscences from Sally, the same good-hearted blarney from James the herd; day after day, he had done, heard, seen the same things, and he was tired, somehow, of them all. The first fine delight of change and novelty was gone; he needed something fresh, something less eternally same. Farm life was very healthful; but so monotonous. It seemed to be all humdrum in Ryfield; rising, eating, drudging, going to bed; a continual running in a circle from the monotony of one duty to the dreariness of another. Always something was in hand; never, so it seemed, was anything being effected. Hunger and

work, eating and rest ; these made life at Ryfield, its pleasures and duties. Mother earth was queen in those parts ; and her rule was stern, and her subjects slaves. And since the rain, cried Frank within himself, the fields were sloughs and the yard a mud-hole ; there was not a book in the house, not a picture worth the seeing ; he could not write, think : oh, assuredly he must do or see some new thing. But how or where ? Go with his notebook on a tramp of exploration ? No ; inclination leaped not that way. Go with Hugh in the tax-cart to Bunn ; see fresh hills, faces, hear fresh shouts of welcome from hill-side throats ? No ; little of change in that. Go, then, for a long walk ; cross the ferry, say, tramp to Lismahee ? The ferry ? The Butlers and Inishrath island ? Yes.

The decision was pleasing. Immediately after dinner Frank buttoned up his coat, lit his pipe, with his hands in his pockets stepped daintily down the lane and out upon the broad road. The day was gray and chilly ; but as Frank strode his spirits ran high. Like a boy playing truant he felt.

He reached Garvagh ferry ; there found nor man nor boat. Up and down the broad lake stretched between its wooded shores, cheerless and desolate. The sky hung low. The wind cried dismally among the willows, mourned in the oaks, piped sorrow on the hazel twigs.

Here and there Frank looked, searching for some one or something ; and his search was barren. What to do ? There was no flagstaff on that side. How then call the ferryman ? Shout ? It seemed absurd ; but Garvagh was in Ireland. See Frank, then, roar-

ing out into the teeth of the wind. Twice, thrice, he shouted ; and neither effort set a soul astir on the island. Well, Frank was confounded. Oh, this Ireland, this eternal home of simplicity and haphazard ! Mouthing, however, might affect nothing ; let him rather try fortune westward along the shore.

It was a rough stretch of beach, thick with stones, stumps, stunted willows ; not half a furlong of it had Frank covered when he chanced upon a cot lying among the rushes. A battered hulk she was, half full of water, oarless ; moreover, was chained and locked to a tree. But does not youth conquer all things ? And, before twenty minutes were gone, had not Frank broken a link between two stones, baled out with a battered meat tin, and, clumsily wielding a thwart as paddle, set off desperately across the depths ?

Half an hour of vigorous paddling—and of some adventure, be it said—and behold Frank at last in Inishrath, the cot fastened to the pier and himself striding up a lane from the shore. For a little way there were trees on either hand ; soon the lane was running up between tall hedges through the open fields. The track was muddy, the hedges untrimmed, the ditches broken ; here a gate dragged on its pivot, there a gap was stopped with branches of whitethorn ; right and left the fields lay barren, covered with whins, rushes, stones ; a desolate aspect, Frank thought, a sorry sight.

Some distance from the shore, the lane suddenly lost one of its hedges and became a mere grass track ; and just there, in the remaining ditch, was a wooden gate, painted green, and beyond it a bit of garden

and a thatched cottage. Frank leant across the gate and spied about him. The garden was orderly, with trim hedges, a couple of beehives, some spring green-stuff and a few early flowers. In the cottage walls were set a green door and four diamond-paned windows, two above and two below; house leek grew on the thatch, and on the sills were green flower-boxes. Was this the home of the Butlers? Frank asked himself, with an eye on the orderliness of cottage and garden. Was it the home of him who owned those desolate fields? he asked again, and looked across his shoulder. Just a minute he stood puzzling; then, opened the gate, went up the garden, and knocked at the green door.

For a while he stood waiting on the step; then, a foot sounded inside, a bolt rattled back, the door opened slightly, and a woman's head and shoulders came into view. Frank raised his hat.

"Excuse me," he said; "but does Mr. Butler live here?"

"He does," came back. The door opened a little wider.

"Ah. Well, my name's Barry—Mr. Frank Barry."

Back swung the door and Mrs. Sarah Butler stood revealed: a lean woman, sallow and sharp of face, black hair screwed into a wisp, arms bare, skirt bunched up beneath her apron, a pair of heavy and muddy boots showing below her tattered petticoat.

"Aw," said she, wiping her lips with a corner of her apron; "aw, it's Mister Frank. An' me thought at first ye were the parson." She laid a flabby hand in Frank's. "I hope I see ye well, Mr. Frank," said she, with a smirk.

"Thank you, I'm very well," answered Frank. "But are you Mrs. Butler?"

"Aw, yis, Mr. Frank; aw, yis. But ye'll be comin' in, sir?" The woman turned, just as Frank was crossing the threshold. "John," she shrilled; "John, where are ye?"

"I'm here." Like a bull's was the voice that answered. "What's up?"

"Aw, it's not his reverence at all; sure it's Mr. Frank himself from London."

There came a sound as of a chair upsetting; the voice began rolling again, a door opened at the end of the hall and out came the man called John.

"What, what?" said he. "Is it Mr. Frank, ye say?" He looked hard at Frank; then, with his arm outstretched, came hurrying up. "Why, so it is," he roared, "so it is. Be the Lord, but I'm glad to see ye, Frank Barry! God bless me soul, but it's changed ye are. Why, how the divil are ye? Great King, to think it's your own self! Och, och, twenty long years. Why, the spit o' your father ye are. Why, I'd know your skin on a bush. Come in, man, come in. Lord, Lord! Come, Frank, me son; come up here till I get a good look at ye."

Hat in hand, Frank went along the hall and up into a little room. There was one small window. The floor was of clay; the ceiling low, and covered, like the walls, with a cheap pink and white paper. Strips of carpet lay near the door and on either side of a round table. On the walls hung photographs, almanacs, samplers, an old-fashioned engraving or two. In a corner stood a glass-fronted press holding a motley array of china and glass. A sofa

stood against the wall, swathed, like the painted chairs, in bright woollen antimacassars. On the table were a few books; the Bible, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Pope* among them; in the middle stood an ornament in coloured wax beneath a glass shade. On the mantelpiece were more photographs, an ancient clock, two brass candlesticks and a few china vases filled with dried grasses. A poor little room it was; yet to Frank Barry's quick eye the sight of it was not displeasing. It was tidy, clean, not cheerless. The trace of a deft hand was over it. Quite too good, it seemed, for the requirements of John Butler and his slattern of a wife; too dainty and refined, Frank might say, just as the trim garden outside had seemed altogether too worthy a setting for the big ring of the desolate fields.

John lifted a chair, dabbed it down before the window; took Frank by the shoulder.

"Sit down, me son," he said; "sit ye down; Sarah, sit ye down. Heavenly hour, Frank, but I'm glad to see ye back. Sure Nan was tellin' us about ye. Haw, haw," he laughed and smacked his knee; "to think o' that fall ye had in the cot, an' her not to know ye till she nearly had ye ferried. Haw, haw! . . . And you're sure you're well? Good, sir, good; though faith you're as thin in the face as a goat fed on stubble. Divil cares if you're well. Man alive, but I'm glad to see ye. Get out the glasses, Sarah, an' the bottle; get them out till we—Now, whisht wi' ye, Frank Barry. Is it your father's son refuse a taste—him that was the best fellow an' the best companion in all Fermanagh! Arrah, whisht wi' ye. . . ."

It was a saying in Garvagh, that John Butler could do nothing better than any man, and talk more than any five—including their wives. Indeed his capacity for speech was astonishing. His talk poured forth even as water pours from a spout. Neither chance of a word, nor time for a thought did he give you; like a spring flood the words came down and swamped you. He was a big man, with a square, ruddy face; the mouth large and mobile, the chin weak and flabby. His eyes were bright and kindly, his nose large, his head crowned with a shock of brown hair.

"Ah, your father was a roarer," John went on, half-filling a tumbler with whisky; "the merriest blade God ever made. Aw, but the girls were mad for him. Ay, ay. Take that in your fist, Frank. Come; none o' your capers. D'ye hear me, I say? That's right. Well." John raised his hand. "Here's luck, Mr. Frank, an' may heaven be your home." He drank and handed his glass to Sarah. "Drink, Sarah," said he.

Mrs. Butler smirked at Frank, bobbed her head.

"Long life to ye, Mr. Barry," said she; then sipped, grimaced, and passed the tumbler back to John.

Frank looked from one to another.

"I look towards you," said he; "and drink your very good health." Slowly he raised his glass, sipped, spluttered; the stuff was sheer poison.

John gave a snort of disgust.

"Pah!" said he; "you're no Barry—no Barry at all. Why, man, your father would ha' finished what's there in once, an' shouted for more. You're not like him there, me son. But tell me, now, how d'ye take

after him in regard to the women? Eh, ye dog ye?" And just there the door opened and in came Nan.

She was dressed simply in a grey dress; a bit of red ribbon showing at her throat, and her black hair falling loosely about her brow. Very charming she looked, thought Frank as he rose to greet her; very charming indeed.

"How do you do, Nan?" said he. "You see I've kept my promise."

She gave Frank her hand.

"You're welcome, Mr. Barry; very welcome," said she; then turned and took a chair beside her mother.

Frank had been sitting with his face to the window, having John on his right and Sarah on his left; now, he shifted his seat and turned from John.

"Your father has been twitting me, Nan," said he, "upon my mishap in the cot the other day. You told tales, then?"

"Ah, yes," answered Nan, with a smile, "sure ye weren't hurt."

"And that is why you told?"

"Ah, no; sure not at all."

"You wouldn't have told, then, supposing I had been hurt?"

"Eh? Why of course. To be sure. Only not in the same way."

Frank laughed.

"I see," he said. "You got home safely, I hope?"

"Ah, yes," answered Nan; "ah, yes."

Somehow, Frank's stream of talk—usually so fluent when very small—would not run. Nan seemed shy,

a little demure. Sarah, he felt, was watching him narrowly. John, he knew, was leaning forward, elbows on knees, hands clasped, his face big with the joviality bred of whisky. Quickly he turned.

“You remember my father well, Mr. Butler?”

John drained his glass, sat back in his chair.

“Knew your father? I knew him better than I know meself. I knew him when he was a babby; I knew him when he was that high—an’ that—an’ that. Sure, we went to school together. Sure, many’s the fight we had. Sure, I mind me——”

John was fairly started; and for the next twenty minutes he sat there rolling out his reminiscences, the while Frank, giving him but half an ear, sat looking now at the geranium pots on the window shelf, now at Nan, now at Sarah, now at John, but most of all at Nan.

Nan was a charming girl, Frank thought; but how strange that she should be the daughter of such parents, particularly of such a mother. John, that big good-natured John, might pass; but the slattern of a mother! No; Nan was not in the least like her mother; for that let the gods be thanked. Was she like John, then? Yes, somewhat; but, taken all in all, she was just herself, just plain Nan. He liked the girl. A very different Nan she looked from the Nan of the old jacket and peaked cap who had ferried him but a few days ago. How was it? Could it be that, knowing he had come, she had adorned herself? Ah! And now he knew another thing. It was she who had arranged that little parlour, who had given to its homeliness that indescribable air of femininity, of taste; it was Nan’s

room not Sarah's or John's; just as the garden outside doubtless was hers also. He glanced at her. With downcast eyes, she sat by her mother twisting a ring round the third finger of her left hand. So! Frank turned quickly away; and the next minute John rose.

"Ay," said John; "that's just how it was. That's the very way the girl came to capture him; an' that's the very way he left these parts and went off on his travels to Dublin. But sure ye know; an' now come away out, Frank, till I show ye the fields. Get the tay, Sarah; an' call us when it's ready."

Frank followed John through the garden, out into the lane, and thence uphill till they came to a circular mound towards which from all sides the island sloped up from the water. This was the highest point of Inishrath; and standing there, Frank had full sight of it all, and of the lake stretching away from its stony shores. In shape it was nearly circular. Round its edge, here and there, were trees. Hedges ran down and across it, and from ditch to ditch lay the bare ribs of the little fields. The soil showed cold and hungry through its covering of stones and coarse grass. Here, two goats were hobbling along, there, a donkey stood forlorn among the whins, in and out of the rush clumps ran scraggs of fowls. Half way down, stood the Butlers' home—tumble-down offices behind, garden in front, the pier and cots below. The wind came shrill and keen; the sky hung low; bleak and barren, Inishrath lay scowling in the waste of grey waters.

John stretched an arm and swept it around.

"There," said he; "there's me estate."

Frank looked right and left, here and there. Yes, thought he ; and an estate to be proud of.

"The whole island, then, belongs to you, John?"

"Such as it is, I own it all—for a consideration in the shape of rent," added John, with a grin.

Frank nodded.

"And yours is the only house upon it, I see?"

"That's all. One house an' one estate, an' all me own."

Again Frank nodded.

"Many a king owns no more."

"Ay, faith," answered John, with a laugh. "An' a good many of them, stretched their full six feet, own a trifle less. Ay, indeed. Och, an' it's the mighty grand king meself is, wi' me two-story castle down there, an' one ass for a subject, an' me fleet lyin' there below. Sure, like the lad in the song,

' From the centre all round to the say,
I am lord of the fowl and the brute.' "

"Yes," said Frank, with a laugh. "So you are. And you never feel lonely?"

"Ah, no," answered John. "Ah, no. People come over kaleyin' o' nights ; an' sure, always we're seein' people at the ferryin'. Ay, we are. An' aren't there four of us, anyway, always round the hearth to keep other company ; an' isn't Ted Ross wi' us that constant ye might call him one of ourselves? Ah, no ; loneliness niver troubles us ; divil a bit does it."

Frank looked at John.

"You said four, I think. What four, pray?"

"What's that?" came back. "What four, ye ask? Isn't there Sarah, sure that's one. An' isn't

there Nan, sure that's two. An' isn't there meself, sure that's three. An' isn't there the ould father, God help him; sure I'd be thinkin' that's nearly four."

"Ah, I see. And who may Ted Ross be?" Frank asked.

"Aw, just a lump of a chap from over the lake that's sweet on Nan."

"Ah." Frank looked away. "Indeed! You'll miss Nan," he went on, in a while, "when Mr. Ross takes her from you?"

John laughed.

"Ah, we will, we will," he said, and fell to rubbing his chin. "But time enough sure to miss her when she goes. It might be long enough before that; sure it might. One niver knows. Maybe she'd niver go. Who knows? Ted's in no hurry; an' Nan's in no hurry; an' we're not. So there ye are, faith; there ye are."

Somehow, Frank's face brightened at the words. Gladly he turned again to John; presently, fashioned a remark which set John's tongue wagging in a long account of himself, and of his many adventures in the welter of things. His father and grandfather had held Inishrath before him. All his life had John lived there. He liked the place and was well content; though sometimes he had a notion how poor a thing it was for mortal man to live and die and never get a squint at the wonders of the big world. But, ah sirs, landlords were the tyrants. Twenty pounds a year he paid in rent; and that for land that couldn't feed goats. Long ago he had quit trying to cultivate it. Now he just let it go to the devil, and trusted to

God and the ferry-money for the rent and the bit to eat. Let Frank look at the land; let him drive his heel into the clay.

"And yet," cried John, wheeling round and spreading his arms; "twice has the landlord served me with a notice because I got into arrears. Twice, I say. What d'ye think of that, Frank Barry?"

Again Frank looked round the fields. Suppose old Hugh lord of that island? thought he. Would its fences then lie broken, its ribs stretch nakedly from ditch to ditch; would only two goats, an ass, and a tribe of fowls be abroad upon it; would old Hugh be standing there with his hands in his pockets, giving voluble proof of his own incompetence?

"I think, John," said he turning, "that in some ways you're a very lucky man, and in some very unlucky." And, quick on his words, Nan's voice came shrilling up from the garden calling them to tea.

The two left the wind-swept rath and went down through the fields; and at the garden gate Frank halted. He would be for home now, he thought. It was getting late; his uncle expected him. John took him by the arm, pulled him across the garden, and shot him through the doorway.

"Uncle be danged," shouted he. "In ye go, Frank Barry. It's not yourself 'll be the first man to leave Inishrath wi' an empty belly. In ye go; straight into the parlour. There, now you're safe, me son," quoth John, and closed the door. "Tryin' to give us the slip, indeed!" John sprawled into a chair and put his hat beneath it. "Wantin' to run off to your uncle, indeed! Yes, that's what he was after, Nan."

Nan put down the teapot.

"Ah, sure ye wouldn't treat us like that, Mr. Frank," said she. "Sure ye wouldn't."

"I'm truly sorry, Nan," answered Frank. "I'll never be guilty again. John, you'll forgive me—and you, Mrs. Butler?" he added, with a look across the table at his hostess, sitting there in her Sunday gown, smirking and playing gentility.

"Ah, to be sure, Mr. Barry," answered Sarah. "To be sure."

"Aw, blood an' ouns, of course," roared John; "of course. Sure I knew ye meant nothin'. An' now what'll ye have, Frank, me son? There's hot sody cake, an' white bread, an' pritta bread, an'—Aw, dang it, Frank, don't let us be doin' the polite. Just put out your fist, an' help yourself to all in the house. Come now; pull up an' help yourself."

So Frank pulled up and helped himself; and the cups rattled on the saucers, and the spoons clinked merrily, and John talked and talked, and Sarah minced and watched, and Nan glanced at Frank, and Frank admired Nan; and, suddenly, across the waters came a cry from the Lismahee side, a long shrill *Ahoy-y-y*.

"The boys from the market," said John, diving for his hat. "Faith, it's early they'll be. Come, Nan, me girl; come away, Sarah. Ye'll forgive us runnin' off, Frank, me son? But the poor must earn their bread be the sweat o' their brow. Ay, ay."

So the feast broke up. All hurried down to the pier; there manned the big ferry cot and, Nan and Frank at one oar, Sarah at the other, John standing by the steering sweep, set her course for the Lis-

mahee side. The night began to fall; the waters lapped against the cot and splashed musically at dip of the oars; but, all the way from Inishrath to the Lismahee side and thence (the cot now full of noisy marketers, some tipsy, some sober, many striking the golden mean) to Garvagh, the only music that sounded for Frank Barry was the soft witchery of Nan's voice, and the only night that fell flashed from Nan's dark eyes; nor did he once, all the way, call to mind the eyes and voice of his dear Maid Marian. Ah, Frank Barry!

Then the cot swung to the pier; out poured the marketers with shout and clamour. Soon Frank was standing in shade of the willows, and Nan was gone, and John's voice was ringing out across the dark waters: "Good night, Mr. Frank. Safe home; an' come again soon."

CHAPTER V.

Two nights went; it was only the afternoon of Monday, yet once again was Frank Barry feeling somewhat restive. He felt inclined to mope, to grumble. The days were long, the nights weary; life, he felt, ran tamely within the precincts of Ryfield. It seemed quite a week, for instance, since Saturday and his visit to Inishrath; it seemed eighteen hours rather than eight since the coming of Marian's letter by that morning's post. Not that he was pining to get back to Inishrath. Oh, no. Not that Marian's letter had brought depression or loneliness. Oh, no, indeed. Nevertheless, time did seem to hang on his hands; he did feel bored and weary.

How was it? Was his environment to be blamed; that, or himself? His environment surely. Think of the last two days. Think of Sunday; its late breakfast, its weary drive through the fields and bogs to the dreary church with its box-pews, harmonium, drawling choir, prosy sermon. Think of the long drive back to a cold dinner, a Puritanical somnolence, a profitless smoke; of that farmhouse parlour at night, stuffy, crowded with rustics, Moody and Sankey with accompaniments by Miss Clodhopper on a battered piano, long prayers, thunderings, sighs; think of the walk home through the rain, the supper of porridge and milk, the long chapter and longer exposition, the

early bed: think of it all! And what of better, so far, had that day brought? None. All the morning he had walked with Hugh about the fields; all the afternoon had been writing to Marian; now his uncle had gone to Bunn, Sally was busy, he had nothing to do. "Oh, confound the place," cried Frank. "What the devil. . . ." Words were useless. He had tea; put on hat and coat, went out.

He struck the broad road; without hesitation turned his face from the ferry. No more Inishrath and tempting black eyes for him yet awhile. Straight on he walked past bogs, hills, cottages, cabins. Away in front stood the long mountain; on either hand stretched the everlasting hedges; above was a low grey sky. He met not a soul, heard scarcely a sound; within twenty minutes was back again at Ryfield gate, his shoulder against it, lighting a fresh pipe and taking his mental bearings. Should he spend the evening chatting with Sally, reading his Shakespeare, making notes for this would-be novel? Or should he retrace his steps and walk till he met old Hugh? Or should he, should he—?

Frank shrugged his shoulders; slowly began walking towards the lake. The trees would be company, he reflected; the wind, the lap of the waves. He came to the shore. Desolate it was, and sombre as ever. Still, he had counted on that; for him gloom held a certain poetic charm. Gathering his coat about him he sat down on the edge of the pier; idly began juggling with phrase and fancy. How weirdly silent the world was. How far away, even, sounded the lap of the waves there at his feet. What a melancholy, so profound, so mysterious, lay at the heart of

nature in these heralding days of sweet spring-time; ah, what joyousness, awakening was in store! How low and dismal the sky hung; how passive were the treacherous waters out there; how stealthily drear night came creeping. There! He liked to see that light spring out so suddenly. It was—yes, it was in Inishrath, in the Butlers' cottage. Perhaps Nan had kindled it. Hark! The steady beat of oars came sounding along the shore. Who could it be? Frank mounted the pier, walked to the water's edge, peered through the twilight. A cot came in sight; came nearer, nearer. Bah! The rower was a man! He turned away, swore; turned again.

"Hello, there," came across the water.

"Hello," answered Frank.

"Are ye for over?"

"No. . . . Stay. For where bound?"

"Inishrath."

"So?" Frank considered. Should he? Should he not? He raised his head. "Well, I'm for there too," he shouted; "if you don't mind taking me."

"An' why not?" came back; within a minute Frank was in the cot and once more adventuring upon the deeps.

Few words passed all the way over. It had fallen dark. The oars clanked loudly. Frank sat pondering. The stranger was smoking. They landed; pulled the cot high and dry upon the shore; together set off up the lane.

"You're strange these parts?" said the man, presently.

"I am," answered Frank; "very strange."

"My name's Ross, if ye'd like to know," said the

man, just as they came to the garden hedge. "Ted Ross, they christened me."

Frank paused.

"Oh," said he; then, after a step or two: "I've heard your name before, I think."

"Ay, mebbe ye have," came back. "An' I'm thinkin' I saw yourself at preachin' last night. It's Mr. Barry, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Ay. Well, there's your way," said Mr. Ross, with a nod at the garden gate. "I'm for the back door."

"And I'm with you," said Frank; so, passed through a gateway, crossed a yard and at Ted's heels went straight into the Butlers' kitchen.

A large room it was, floored with cement, and lighted by a tin lamp that hung in the chimney nook. The walls were smoke-stained, the ceiling sooty-black. From the joists hung clusters of onions, strings of smoked bream, bacon, bladders, dried herbs; a gun rested above the fireplace; on the walls were tins, nets, hay-twisters, harness; the dresser shone like the windows of a china shop; in the corners stood oars, poles, bundles of osiers, lengths of split wood.

John Butler, seated with his back to the chimney-jamb, was making a basket; Sarah his wife, arms bare and skirt bunched about her waist, was stirring green-stuff into a pot that bubbled over the fire; in the corner farthest from the door, sat an old man in a high-backed chair.

"God save all here," said Ted Ross; making for a stool.

"Save ye kindly," answered John, looking up. "Bully Ted—Eh? What!" John rose. "Why, it's Frank Barry; dang me, if it isn't. How did ye come? How the divil are ye, Frank? Man alive! Thunder an' turf! An' to come to the kitchen! Ted, ye divil, what in glory made ye bring Mr. Barry to the back dure?"

"His own feet brought him," answered Ted from his place by the hearth. "His own feet an' his own free will. Where's Nan?" he asked of Sarah, who, whilst John was questioning, deftly had been smoothing her hair, ordering her skirt, wiping her face with a corner of her apron.

"Milkin'," answered Sarah; then turned to Frank. "Good evenin', Mr. Barry," said she.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Butler. I hope I see you well, ma'am."

"Aw, yis," said Sarah; "aw, yis. But ye'll be comin' up to the room above, Mr. Barry. Sure this is no place for ye at all; sure it's all of a muck."

Frank dragged a chair towards the hearth.

"It's the place I like," said he. "With your permission, ma'am, I'll share your hearthstone for a while?"

Mumbling her excuses, Sarah backed towards the dresser; but John gripped Frank's shoulder.

"Well said," said he; "well said, me son. Down ye sit, an' may the fire never shine on a worse man, say I. Sit ye down."

Frank threw off his coat, laid it on the table, sat down. On his right was the old man. On his left Ted Ross sat hunched on a stool. Sarah lifted the pot from the crook, carried and set it in the middle

of the floor. A fine flavour of boiled kale, and a sudden burst of steam, went up to the rafters. John flung his basket below the table, turned to the fire and dragged forward his stool.

"That's the ould man," said he, looking at Frank and waving his hand across the hearth. "Father," he roared, "I say, father. Here's Mr. Barry all the way from London come over to see us."

"Ay, ay," said ould John, and gave Frank a moment's look at his wizened face, all yellow and puckered, set with weary lack-lustre eyes, crowned with a shock of snowy hair.

"A powerful age he is," whispered John to Frank; "an ojus age. He knows nothin' or nobody. He's just alive, God help him. Ye know Ted Ross?" he said aloud, with a jerk of his thumb.

"Yes," said Frank. "We made each other's acquaintance a while ago."

Ted grunted assent. John rubbed his hands together, spread them to the blaze; began to talk. Powerful late the spring was in showing its nose; terrible hard it was on people to get never a chance to cut a turf; shocking hard it would be to get the next half year's rent together. Ay, ay. Sure the country was gone to the dogs. Sure the blaggards of landlords were ruining everything.

A step sounded in the yard; the latch rattled and in came Nan. John ceased talking; Sarah, still occupied with the contents of the pot, coughed warningly; Ted sat stolidly on, pipe in mouth and his face to the fire. Frank rose.

"How d'you do, Nan?" he said. "Here I am again, you see."

Nan stood her milking porringer on the table ; came forward and gave Frank her hand.

" You're kindly welcome, Mr. Barry," said she ; then pulled a stool from beneath the table, set it between Ted and her father and sat down. Ted took his pipe from his mouth.

" Bully, Nan," said he, and went on smoking.

" Well, Ted," answered Nan ; then folded her hands and fixed her eyes on the fire.

John went on with his rigmarole. Frank leant back in his chair, hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat ; with the tail of his eye fell to observing the methods of rustic lovers. Close together, almost elbow to elbow, they sat ; yet of each other's presence seemed to take no heed. As wooden as a graven image, Ted sat sucking at his pipe. Like patience on a monument (the simile is Frank's own), Nan sat staring at the pothooks. Surely they must have quarrelled ? thought Frank. Surely this Ross was a very boor. He took good stock of him. A muscular young fellow he seemed ; broad of shoulder, thick of neck, big of limb. His face was strong and well moulded ; his brown hair curled closely ; his skin shone healthily. He was dressed in rough tweed, leggings, a peaked cap and hobnailed boots. No Adonis, thought Frank, decidedly no gentleman ; still, and Frank glanced at Nan, no denying that physically they were a well-matched pair. But was the man wooden, thought Frank ; and, even as the thought came, Ted turned to his sweetheart.

" Ye weren't at preachin' last night ? "

" No."

"An' why not?"

"I couldn't get away."

"H'm." With a grunt, Ted faced the fire again.

Frank raised his brows, smiled to himself; then stretched his legs towards the blaze and gave full ear to John's discourse.

Hitherto John had been talking disjointedly, half-heartedly; now, at sight of Frank giving him full heed, quickly he found himself, stretched forth a hand and gave his tongue the reins.

The subject was Ireland (that everlasting subject), and the land question (that eternal question); vehemently John grappled with it. Ah, he knew a thing or two. Hadn't he eyes? What were politicians but a tribe of bagpipes? What was Government but an old woman? What was Ireland but a home of lost causes? and John rolled the phrase, picked, doubtless, in some chance garden of editorial wisdom, about his tongue. What were its people but beggars, outcasts, hewers of wood and drawers of water? Who would save Ireland, sir? shouted John, shooting forth a finger. Would England, sir? Would politicians, sir? Would God save Ireland? shouted John again. No, sir. But this is what would save her, and John's voice sank solemnly: Herself, sir, and her own true sons.

Frank sat listening to this, and to ever so much more, with enjoyment. It was all so novel, so whimsical. The scene, the moment, appealed to him. He liked this windbag of a John, liked to watch his moon-red face, his flaming eyes, darting hands; liked to hear his voice, so mellow and big and richly twanged with the loughside brogue. And, besides

this or that, whatever else John could not do, talk he could, and well.

John Butler was a man of small education, and his powers of brain and mind were not great; but he had read a few books, was a close student of the newspapers, and whatever he read he remembered. He could quote you leading articles, Latin quotations and all, by the yard. He could recite whole pages from *Bunyan*, and long chapters from the *Book of Proverbs* or the *Lamentations of Jeremiah*. Constantly in his discourse was some chance line, garnered in heaven knows what corner of the mighty Press, of the poets in evidence. He knew much of *Pope* by heart. If by any hap, he went to church, he would reel you out the sermon all the way home, mangling its style and theology out of all knowing. And nowhere did he shine more gloriously than by his own fireside; there, with his old father blankly eyeing him across the hearth, with Sarah his wife facing him, hands spread on her knees, back as straight as any ramrod, eyes and face very signals of attention, with Ted and Nan sitting mum at his elbow, and some chance visitor in the post of honour before the fire. At these times, John was great; but set a man such as Frank—a scholar, a Londoner and a Barry—in sight of the pothooks, and John was mighty. He quoted, ranted, banged his knees, whacked his fists, tore this poor Irish question into quivering shreds: *whew-w*, you might have thought him some impassioned patriot lunging it from Tara's hill. And Frank, lounging in the chair of honour, now glancing at Nan, now at Sarah, sometimes flinging an encouraging word into the bonfire

of John's eloquence, enjoyed it all vastly ; vowed to himself that the thing was worth all the screeds of Hyde Park or the thunderings of Peckham Rye.

Presently, John's tongue slackened somewhat ; and, in the lull that came, Frank heard Nan laugh softly. He looked ; there were our sweethearts with their heads together. Ted had twisted round on his stool, and cheek on hand was whispering ; Nan, hands crossed on her lap, and her eyes lowered, was listening. Her lips were slightly parted ; there was a smile on her face ; and at sight of her Frank frowned.

John's voice died out. Softly came the whispering.

"Sure, I waited an' waited for ye outside, an' ye niver came. Och, I niver heard one word the preacher said for thinkin' of ye."

"Did ye, Ted ? Did ye ?"

"Och, ye might have managed to come. Sure, powerful lonely I was all the way home."

"Whisht, Ted, whisht ;" and at the word, Ted, suddenly aware that silence had fallen upon the kitchen, rushed round on his stool, glared at Frank ; then leant towards the fire to light his pipe. Steadily Frank kept his eyes on Nan's face. How well that blush became her. What brows she had, what lips, what hair ! Nan looked up, glanced at Frank ; flushed crimson, and dropped her eyes again. Ah, what eyes, what eyes !

John smoked for a while ; rested elbows on knees, clasped his hands, turned once more towards Frank.

"You'd be thinkin' a power, Frank, o' the poetry o' Pope, I'm thinkin' ?" said he, cocking his head.

"No, John ; as poetry I think but little of it."

"Ay ? Just so. An' why, may I ask ?"

Oh, Frank had many reasons for his opinion : was John very anxious to hear them? Yes; John was bursting with anxiety. Well, then . . . and Frank went on to state his case. John listened attentively, contenting himself with an occasional snort of dissent, or a wondering click of the tongue; listened attentively till Frank had finished, then smacked his lips and turned to the fire.

Ah, yes. Frank spoke like a newspaper, so he did. Pope didn't write poetry, said Frank; he was only a kind of pastrycook that baked cakes of prose and put a crust of rhyme on top. That was how Frank talked. Yes.

"But mebbe ye'd tell me," quoth John, glancing sideways at Frank, "what ye might call this prose?"

Frank defined prose.

"An' what might ye call poetry?" asked John, with a knowing look in his eye.

Frank gave a definition of poetry.

"Ay," said John. "I know. Well, there's a newspaper over there. D'ye call that poetry?"

Of course Frank did not.

"Well, in the top corner of that newspaper," John went on, "ye'll find somethin' headed, *An Ode to Spring*. It goes like this;" and whacking his hands together in pace with the rhythm, John quoted a verse or two of hillside doggerel. "D'ye call that prose, now?"

Of course Frank did not.

"Isn't poetry, then?" John's voice rang in a shout of victory. "Ah, whisht wi' ye," cried he, and turned from the sound of Frank's explanation. "If it isn't one, it must be t'other. An' can't any fool

see it is. Doesn't it go *jog along, jog along, jog along*, wi' a lilt an' a swing to it? . . . Ah, shame on ye, Frank Barry. Man alive, if that's all ye learnt in London, you'd ha'been better employed fishin' for eels in the lake below. Tut, tut! Man, dear, a little learnin's a dangerous thing. I tell ye, sir, Pope's a rattler. Compare him wi' Tommy Moore, or Bobby Burns—

"Or Willy Shakespeare," interposed Frank, with a scorn that was withering.

"Ay, or Willy Shakespeare," roared John. "Damme, d'ye think that hurts Pope? No, Sir. Tell me, did ye iver read *The Essay on Man*? Ye did. An' ye didn't like it? Holy fly! Why, man, it's wonderful to the world. Listen to this (John quoted thunderingly); an' this (John spouted interminably); an' this. . . ."

Frank sheathed sword. As well try to breast Niagara, he felt, as bear up against the torrent of John's bluster; as well try to whistle down a thunderstorm, as endeavour a word between the onset of his sentences. What a fool he had been. He had attempted to lighten the noisome wastes of rustic ignorance, had hoped to shine a little in John's eyes—and in Nan's—and now! Oh, confound Pope; and confound John Butler. Let the blockhead thunder away.

So John thundered away; passed presently from his eulogium of Pope to a disquisition on religion, and therein found such disport, that Frank, in his discredited seat of honour, was forced to silent contemplation of one or another in that little semicircle gathered there before the fire.

In his armchair, old John was asleep, chin on breast and his lips dribbling. Low on a stool, Sarah sat rounding the heel of a gaudy red and blue sock, her eyes fast on John's face, her lips moving in count with the loops that slipped from her fingers. On his left, now moved a little farther back from the hearth, the lovers sat whispering and bobbing heads. What were they saying? Frank wondered. What of pretty, or of amorous even, could a lout like Ted Ross find wherewith to witch Nan's little ear? Suppose he, Frank Barry, in Ted's place, would he be able to say aught that Ted had never said, bring from Nan smiles that Ted had never seen, see something shining in her eyes that Ted might never see? He wondered. Were they really in love? How came it that Nan was not wearing her ring? Ah, he liked Nan's face. And to think that her beauty, her worth, were all for the keeping, sooner or later, of a bumpkin! It was woful, thought Frank; then, writhed on his chair, and set it creaking; and at the sound, Nan looked up, caught his eye, blushed, looked down and nudged her sweetheart. With a clatter of his stool and a muttered oath, round swung Ted; and Frank turning, found John's face, as round and rosy as a harvest-moon, turned full upon him. His eyes were twinkling; knowingly he winked at Frank, laughed and jerked his thumb towards the lovers.

"They make a purty pair?" said he. "Eh, Frank?"

Nan blushed deeper. Ted scowled. Frank grinned.

"I seen ye watchin' them," John went on. "Ah, ye rascal ye. Just in time I was to catch ye."

"Ach, keep quiet, can't ye," growled Ted. "Why can't ye keep on wi' your blarney an' leave people alone?"

"Ay, an' leave you to yours, Ted," answered John, with a laugh. "Ay, ay. Love an' blarney, love that makes the world go round, an' blarney that keeps it goin'. Ay, ay. Well, fire away, me son, fire away. Ye won't be young always, me boy, an' once the sootherin' days are over, they're over for always. That's right, Frank, isn't it? That's your opinion?"

"Something like that, John."

"Aw, yis." John sighed. "Somethin' like that. Sure it's not so long since meself an' Sarah over there were blarneyin' too, sittin' on stools wi' our nobs together, an' whisperin' an' titterin', an' runnin' out to see the moon. Aw, yis. Ye mind that time, Sarah?"

Sarah bent her head over her knitting; across her face stole the shadow of a blush.

"Aw, sure," she said. "Aw, sure."

"An' the divil's own blarneyer meself was, wasn't I, Sarah? Always talkin' as big as the moon an' as bright? Eh, Sally?"

"Aw, 'deed ay," sighed Sarah. "'Deed ay."

"Ah, but sure it never hurt us," John went on; "divil a hurt. All the better we were for our romancin', an' if we're wiser now, what are we the better? Sorrow a bit. Sure it's well to be young; ay, it is."

"Ay, it is," echoed Sarah.

"Often I think in me heart," John went on, bending over his knees and looking into the fire, "that

we've a power to be thankful for. Yis. We've our health, an' a bit to eat, an' a roof over our heads, an' what more does one want?"

"A danged sight more," muttered Ted Ross.

"Come Christmas time," mused John, "I'll be fifty. Yis. Fifty years? It's a big age. Ay. An' all that time here I've been harboured, here in these four walls. There's been trouble sometimes, an' worry, an' heart-break. Ay, there has. But, after all, things haven't been so bad, Sally? Eh, Sally?"

"Ah, no, John; ah, no."

"Fifty years? I wonder who'll be sittin' here come fifty more? Ay, ay. I wonder if it's God's will we'd be sittin' here this time next year."

"Ask me this time next year," said Ted Ross.

John looked at Frank.

"D'ye think, Frank Barry," said he, with unusual solemnity of voice and manner, "that if so be we were iver turned out of Inishrath—?"

"Nobody but yourself 'll iver turn ye out of Inishrath," said Ted Ross.

"Ah, whisht," pleaded Nan, laying her hand on Ted's arm; "whisht, Ted."

"I'm obliged to ye, Ted," said John, in his suavest voice; "I'm obliged to ye. All the same I'm free, I'm thinkin', to ask Mr. Frank there, whether supposin' it's God's will—"

"God's will!" snapped Ted; and again Nan pleaded him to whisht.

"—Supposin' it's God's will we'd iver be turned out of Inishrath, he thinks there's work waitin' for the likes of us, over in big London?"

"There's too much waitin' for ye here," shouted

Ted; and once more Nan whispered: "Och, whisht, Ted; whisht."

"Ye'll answer me, Mr. Frank?" asked John.

"Don't answer him, Mr. Barry," said Ted.

John swung round on his stool.

"Who's master in this house, Ted Ross?" shouted he. "You or me?"

"You are, John Butler," answered Ted; "an' a danged bad master ye make, let me tell ye. You an' your foolery! You an' your talk about bein' turned out of Inishrath! I tell ye again, nothin'll iver turn ye out but your own danged laziness. An' I tell ye again, for the hundredth time I tell it to ye, that it'd be better for ye to die in the workhouse than be turned loose in London, or any other wilderness of a city. Isn't that true, Mr. Barry," said Ted, turning to Frank. "Isn't it true?"

Then Nan rose.

"I think, mother," said she, "it's about time we were gettin' supper. Come, an' I'll be helpin' ye."

CHAPTER VI.

SUPPER was over. Nan and Sarah were clearing the table; John and Frank sat smoking; on the hearth stood Ted with his back to the fire. Of a sudden Ted flung up his arms and yawned.

"Heigho," said he. "Faith it must be time for home. You'll be with me, I accuse, Mr. Barry?"

"Certainly," said Frank, rising. He bade the Butlers good-night; put on hat and coat and turned towards the door. But Ross kept his place by the fire, and stood balancing now on this foot now on that. "I'm quite ready," said Frank.

"Ay," said Ted. "Well, so am I. But—aw, I'll be after ye. I'll catch ye up afore ye get to the gate. Yis, I will."

Frank hesitated. He had no wish to go stumbling in the darkness down that muddy lane.

"But I can wait for you," said he.

"Aw, ye needn't, ye needn't," stammered Ted. "Sure—aw, I'll not be a second."

With a laugh, John Butler rose.

"Come away," he said, taking Frank by the arm. "I'll show ye as far as the shore. Can't ye see," he went on, as they crossed the yard, "that it's a private kiss Ted wants at the door. To be sure. An' you or me, Frank, 's not wanted at these little affairs. Aw, no. Whisht," said John, and stopping raised his hand.

A sound of smothered laughter, of scuffling feet, came from the kitchen. "Ay, they're at it," said John, walking on. "Powerful is Ted's appetite for kisses; powerful. An' sure women are always women, an' Nan pretends to be shy; an' so always at partin' there's the same how d'ye do. Ay, there is."

"Indeed?" said Frank. "How very curious!"

"Ay, that's so; that's so."

The two passed out of the yard and went down the lane. The trees stood black and dead; beyond the hedges the fields slept in their loneliness; not a sound was there, far or near, not a sound but the level drawl of John Butler's voice, wandering here and there in the darkness round this subject and round that.

They came to the lake; launched Ted's cot and sat down upon its gunwale. John went on talking; Frank, with a sound as of kissing in his ears, leant forward and fell to tapping his heels impatiently on the stones. Presently he shot upright.

"I don't hear Mr. Ross coming," said he; "I wish he'd come."

"Ay?" said John. "Well, I'll bring him." He whistled shrilly on his fingers. "That'll hurry him."

Ten minutes passed; twenty went; John talked of this and that, chiefly of big London; Frank, still with that sound as of kissing in his ears, began to fume.

"Confound the fellow," cried he, at last. "Confound him."

"Aisy, Frank," said John; "aisy, man. If he doesn't come—Whisht, here he is."

From away up the lane came a jabber of voices;

then, "Well, good-night, Nan"—"Aw, good-night, Ted;" then the thud of feet among the trees.

"At last," said Frank, rising.

"Ay, there's an end to all things," said John. "Even to blarneyin'."

Breathless, and somewhat flurried, Ted reached the shore; at once began his apologies. He was sorry to have kept Mr. Barry waiting; he hadn't meant to be so long.

"Aw, hold your whisht, Ted," John Butler broke in, and swung the cot round to the pier. "Sure it's no time at all you've been—considerin' what you've been at. Now, no more talk, Ted; but in ye go an' hurry home to your bed afore your lips have time to cool. Now then, Frank, me son. Off ye go," said John, and with a push of his foot sent the cot skimming away. "Safe home, both o' ye. Come again soon. An' good-night."

"Good-night, John," answered Frank.

"Same to you," shouted Ted Ross; then, bending across his oars, sent a long cry out into the night, a cry that rang along the shore, echoed from the hills, died away among the woods; suddenly was born again on the face of Inishrath and came back to Ted in a long sweet halloo.

"There it comes," shouted John from the quay. "One goose answerin' another. Haw, haw!"

"Haw, haw," laughed Ted; then spat on his hands, dipped his oars, with long sweeping strokes sent the cot flying for Garvagh.

It was a moonless night but not dark; fresh but not cold. Not a breath of wind was blowing. Silence brooded over the waters, and the calm deeps

were sown with stars. Behind in Inishrath a light shone in the Butlers'; round the lake, here and there, other lights glimmered out; far and near the woods lay stretched in their blackness along the shores. Away towards the mountain, a drum was rolling out defiance to the natives of the hills; as from another world, so remote was the sound, came the baying of a dog. *Clink, clink*, went the oars against the tholepins; *drip, drip-p-p*, said the blades as they swung for a stroke; *swish*, cried the water as the cot went flying. Right and left stretched the water—a mystic mirror sprinkled with silver dust; behind, the stars lay jumbled in the foaming wake. Never before had Frank seen night in nobler garb, never before sat brooding in his nothingness beneath an ampler dome, in the depths and vasts of a grander hall of silence.

Suddenly Ted Ross threw back his head, and set his oars swinging to the tune of a hillside ballad. Of Love and Beauty sang Ted, of teeth like pearls, and eyes shining like the morning, of a voice, och so soft, of lips, och so sweet, of his own darlint, own little colleen. Aw, but she was fair; aw, but she was dear to him; aw, but she had raven hair, an' aw, that she was near to him!

"Sing out; sing out," shouted Ted. "Man alive, give it voice:

*Up on the hillside lives me little colleen,
All day long does she think of me;
Dear to me heart is me smilin' little Naneen,
Sweeter than the breath o' morn is she.*

"Aw, you're not singin'," called Ted. "But maybe ye don't know it. Wait now. Ay; you'll know

this." And out over the waters went the rollicking burden of *Biddy Aroo*. Swiftly now did the oars go swinging, crisply they bit the water. Ted's voice rose and fell, dallied with the grace notes, coyed with the shakes, softly went gliding for the mad burst of the chorus. "Aw, man, sing out; sing out," shouted Ted. "Louder, louder. That's it. An' now once more. Aisy, sir; aisy does it. *Aw, luv, fare-well*," drawled Ted, wagging his head from side to side. "*Aw, luv, fare-well*;" then, as if to rend the firmament:

"Wid aroo, aroo, ar-ah; aroo, aroo, ar-ah;
Aroo, aroo, an' ready—oh-h-h;
There's wish-ky in the jar.

"Good," cried Ted, "that's how to take the lonesomeness out o' the night; that's the way to make the blood bounce in-ye. Aw, blood an' turf, but it's the grand night! Ah, damme, but I must let it out." Madly he skirled up at the stars; then hung on his oars, just as the cot swung round for the landing place. "Whisht. Listen to it travellin' round the shores; listen to the ring of it; listen—Aw, dang your eyes, John Butler," said Ted, as from Inishrath pier came John's bellow, *Bully boys; bully boys. Hurroo*; "dang your eyes for a big bull; an' you should be in your bed by this. Aisy, Mr. Barry, till she strikes land. There ye are, now; safe over, an' God be thanked."

Ted pulled the cot high upon the shore, swung the oars across his shoulders, and with Frank set off through the fields. Presently they struck the Garvagh road and turned towards Ryfield. Frank was

in moody humour. Still was that sound as of kissing in his ears; still that long-drawn cry from the hill-side. He wished to be quiet; wanted to think about Marian, and Rab, and Nan; and here at his elbow was this boisterous yokel, this full-blooded clodhopper! Of course the fellow had reason for his mirth; still. . . .

Ted clanked the oars together; looked round about him and up at the stars.

"Holy fly, but it's the bully night," said he; "the finest I iver seen. As fresh as new hay it is, an' as hearty as a mountain side. Be danged, but it makes one feel like a bull of—of—What the divil do they call the place? Some place in the Scriptures?"

"Bashan," suggested Frank.

"Ay, that's it; that's how the verse goes. Like a bull of Bashan, says King David in that grand way of his. Faith, that's not bad. I wonder, now, if John Butler iver said anything like that. I wonder did he?"

"Very likely," said Frank. "His tongue seems to pick up most things."

"Ay, it does. Sure in all the world there's not such another word-slinger as John Butler. Not one. Dang me, but I often think his tongue's on a pivot an' can't stop wagglin' once it gets started. Wouldn't that be your opinion, Mr. Barry?"

"Well, hardly that," answered Frank, with a laugh. "But certainly it can run pretty freely."

"Ah, run; faith, it's Heaven's own mercy he's the only one of his kind within sound of a drum. One does for a change, two maybe'd keep other company at times; but more than that'd be worse than King

Solomon's wives an' them all beggarwomen. But sure ye know it for yourself. Now, tell me this, Mr. Barry," said Ted, shifting his oars from one shoulder to another. "What's your own private opinion of John as a spouter."

Frank shrugged his shoulders, considered a moment; gave it as his opinion that, taking all things into consideration, John talked remarkably well.

"Ay?" said Ted. "I know. An' what things would ye be considerin'?"

"Oh, such things, perhaps, as lack of education, of a wider knowledge."

"Ay," said Ted again. "I know. The things that a man like yourself might have."

Hastily Frank demurred. Not at all, he explained; only the things that your good talker must have.

"I see," said Ted. "Well now, an' as a man, what d'ye think of him?"

Hm. Ha. As a man? Well, Frank liked John Butler. He thought him kindly, big-hearted. His laugh was enough to make one love him. Seldom had he seen a more jovial face; and his hospitality was—well, it was Irish.

"I know," said Ted. "Tell me, did ye see the fields? Ye did. Well?"

"They seemed neglected. Don't mistake me, Mr. Ross; I quite see that John Butler has his faults."

"Faults," interrupted Ted; "is it faults ye say? Why man, he's one great big fault. Ah, I can't keep me patience wi' him," cried Ted, clanking the oars on his shoulder. "Ivery time I see him I feel me hands itchin' to take him be the scruff o' the neck, put a spade in his fist an' drag him out to the fields.

Ye seen them. Arent' they a disgrace to God's earth. Isn't the whole place only a wilderness. Ah, I can't think of it." Ted paused for a little while. "I tell ye a strivin' man could make Inishrath like the Garden of Eden. I wish to glory I was fixed on it. In a year I'd turn ivery thistle on it into a cabbage. But no matter; I'm not John Butler; an' thank God for that mercy. Look at him; a whole island to himself, a good house to live in. But sure, ye know. Why, damme, it's king o' the Lough he should be! But no. That's not John Butler. No, sir. So long as there's a bit for his belly, an' a roof over his head, he's content. Let the land go to blazes, says John; let the people talk, says John; let the divil do his endeavours, says John, but I'm goin' to take things aisy. Ay, that's John. Risin' late, fillin' his belly, slitherin' about from mornin' to night, laughin' here, jokin' there, talkin' for ever an' ever Amen. There's John for ye, and there's his day, spring, summer, autumn an' winter. There's not as good-for-nothin' a man on the face o' God's earth. If the house was afire he'd light his pipe wi' the blazin' thatch. Ach, it makes me sick," cried Ted. "I dunno how I have patience wi' him."

"You didn't have much with him to-night." Frank ventured.

"Didn't I?" Ted stopped. "How d'ye know I didn't? How d'ye know what I didn't say? Patience! Great father, an' me burstin' to get at him. If it hadn't been for Nan I'd—I'd ha' flittered him. London! D'ye think, says he, if iver I'm put out of Inishrath. . . Ach," cried Ted, walking on again, "it's sickenin'. Who the blazes wants to turn him

out? The tyrants o' landlords, says he, the infernal tyrants o' landlords. Why, I tell ye, if the landlord had his rights it's on the parish John'd be years ago. Ay, an' it's there he'll be yet afore he dies; sure as death it is."

"You think, then, he has grounds for his fears?" asked Frank.

"Look ye here, Mr. Barry." Ted stopped again. "Ivery man in this world is afeerd o' what he deserves. An' hasn't John Butler the right to be afeerd when the bailiffs are always at his heels; when he niver has a pound note to wrap round a sixpence; when he's always as bad the day as he was yesterday, an' 'll be no better the morrow than he is the day? Hasn't he the right to be afeerd, I ask ye?"

"He has," answered Frank. "And you think he won't improve?"

"Think," said Ted, and laughing walked on. "I wish I was as sure o' Heaven's gates as I am o' that. No, sir. John Butler's a hopeless specimen."

"And yet one likes him," said Frank.

"Likes him? Sure it's love him one does—ay, love him."

"And you think some day he'll have to go?"

"Once the ould father dies it's sure as death, if John doesn't mend his ways. The father was a dacent man; so long as he can draw breath—well, no one likes to see gray hairs in the ditch. But when he dies—" Ted moaned.

"Well, what then? There is always London, you know."

Ted looked at Frank over the oars.

"London," said he. "London! Damme, when he

mentions that I could dance on his neck. Him in London ! Arrah, what for ? D'ye imagine money walks about the London streets, an' loaves o' bread, just for the likes o' John Butler to pick up ? ”

“ Perhaps both are as plentiful there as on the Irish hills.”

“ I believe ye,” said Ted. “ But listen to this : for a man like John Butler, Ireland's the only place in the world that's foolish enough to keep him. Ye hear that ? ”

“ I do.”

“ An' ye hear this,” added Ted. “ John Butler may go to glory in his own way, but there's one of his name he'll not take with him, as long as I have a bone in me. No, sir.”

There came a short pause ; then said Frank :

“ You mean Nan ? ”

“ I do.”

Another pause.

“ You're fond of Nan ? ”

“ Ah ! ”

Another pause, then :

“ I think you have a charming sweetheart, Ted.”

“ I'm thankful to ye.”

Frank caught his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets ; looked up at the stars, kicked idly at the stones, turned again to Ted.

“ You're a lucky man,” he said. “ I almost envy you.”

“ I know,” grunted Ted.

Frank looked here and there across the hedges. Ted, with his eyes fixed on the road, trudged firmly along. Suddenly he looked up.

"She's the best girl in Ireland," said he ; "an' I know it. She's the very best. I like her well. I'd do anything for her. She's as pure in the heart as gold itself."

"I believe you," said Frank. And thereafter silence held these two, all the way to Ryfield.

Frank bade Ted good-night, hurriedly went up the lane ; crossed the yard, passed through the kitchen and softly opened the parlour door ; there, half asleep in his chair before the fire, sat old Hugh. A moment Frank paused ; then shrugged his shoulders and strode into the room.

"Hello, uncle," said he. "I didn't expect to find you up so late."

"I know ye didn't," answered Hugh. "I waited for ye."

"That's good of you, uncle Hugh." There was a letter lying on the table. Frank lifted it, smiled and sat down.

"You'll want your supper?" asked Hugh. "It's there for ye." He nodded at a dish that lay beneath a tin cover inside the fender.

"Thank you, uncle." Frank opened his letter. "But I don't feel hungry."

"No? Mebbe you've had it? Where've ye been?" asked Hugh abruptly, and for the first time turned his head. Frank glanced from his letter, raised his brows ; went on reading.

"Oh, wandering about," he answered airily ; "wandering about."

"Ay. You've been wandering a good while it seems. Come, sir. Answer me. Where've ye been, I say?"

Frank looked over the top of his letter.

"Must I really answer?"

"I ask ye."

"Well then, if you must know—I've been to Inishrath."

Hugh turned in his chair.

"I know. Thank God ye didn't lie to me. An' what took ye to Inishrath, may I ask?" Frank seemed absorbed in his letter, his legs crossed, a smile on his lips. Hugh slapped the arms of his chair and bent his brows. "D'ye hear me, Frank Barry. What took ye to Inishrath, I say?"

Frank uncrossed his legs, frowned slightly, bent forward.

"Well," he drawled, with a heave of his shoulders; "really, uncle, I don't know what took me. I was lonely here; I wanted a change," He waved his hand. "Candidly, I went to see John Butler."

"I see," said Hugh grimly. "I know. To see John? An' this'll be the first time ye seen him?"

"No—not exactly."

"I see," said Hugh again. "I know. Ye've been to Inishrath before, then?"

"Yes; I have." Frank sat back and raised his letter.

"An' it's only John Butler ye went to see?" Frank did not answer. Quickly Hugh twisted in his chair and gripped its arms. "Didn't I warn ye th' other day," said he, with sudden fierceness, "against John Butler? Didn't I as much as say you'd better *not* see him? Didn't I, sir?"

"Yes; I believe you did say something to that effect, uncle."

"Didn't I say he was a good-for-nothing, an' a wind-bag?"

Frank looked at the fire.

"I think, uncle, that you are a little hard on John Butler. I can't quite agree with you. He has faults; but I find him a very interesting and not unworthy man."

"Ay, ye do." Hugh shot out an arm. "An' why? Because he's the father of a very interestin' daughter. That's why."

Frank lowered his letter.

"You're not quite accurate in your guesses, uncle."

"I'm accurate enough. People don't go twice to Inishrath inside three days just to see John Butler. No. A pretty thing," cried Hugh; "a pretty thing for me to be sittin' here all the evenin' knowin' you were away payin' your respects to the daughter of a windbag!"

Frank smiled.

"You're wrong again, uncle. The young lady's sweetheart happened to be there all the evening."

"Then the more shame for you," cried Hugh. "Ah, ye may talk. Ah, d'ye think I don't know ye? D'ye think I can't read ye like a book? Didn't I know from the first sight I had o' your face that a woman could wheedle the heart out o' ye? Answer me this, Frank Barry. Didn't Nan Butler's face draw ye to Inishrath this night?"

Frank shook his head.

"No. It was quite an accident that I went at all."

"You're shufflin'," cried Hugh. "Answer me! Have ye any regard for her?"

Frank looked at Marian's letter; smiled; glanced at Hugh's stern face.

"I think well of Nan Butler," he made answer. "As for the rest—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Think well of her!" Hugh snorted. "Think well of a countryside hussy without a decent dud to her back! Tell me," he asked, leaning forward and shooting out a forefinger. "Who's that letter from?"

"It's from—London."

"It's from your sweetheart, sir," shouted Hugh. "From the young woman that believes in ye. That's who it's from. An' yet before a week ye go playin' her false! Ah, whisht; I know it. Look ye here, Frank." Hugh began wagging a finger. "Your father was like ye, an' he broke more hearts in his time than he was worth. He was a fool; an' you'll be a fool if ye don't take care. Take my advice. One woman trusts in ye; I hope she does; let one be enough. One's enough for most men; mebbe you'd be as well without that one; but no matter. She believes in ye, an' if she's worth havin' she's worth keepin'. That's all, Frank," said Hugh, rising; "that's all. I had to say it. I had to say it."

Frank also rose.

"You needn't have said it, uncle. Believe me you need not."

Hugh turned on his way to the door.

"Ah, but I know better," said he. "I know better. Man, it's in your face." He came back and laid a hand on Frank's shoulder. "D'ye mind what I said th' other day? 'Be a man,' said I; 'be a man.' Well, I say that again. Good-night, Frank; good-night."

“Good-night, uncle.” The door closed. Frank sat down and stirred the fire. “Dear old man,” he said. “A little trying, a little rough—but he means well.” He lay back in his chair and picked Marian’s letter from the table. “And now,” murmured he. “Now !”

The letter was very long ; as Frank read it, sometimes his face was smiling, sometimes grave ; now he muttered a word and looked at the fire ; once his eyes filled with tears. Presently, he put away the letter, took a portrait from his pocket, and for a long while sat gazing at it. “Dear Marian,” he murmured. “Oh, my dearest Maid Marian. . . There is no one like you,” he said at last, and rose for bed. “No one. No one.”

CHAPTER VII.

FOR a while, Frank Barry kept from Inishrath. He knew old Hugh was watching him ; nothing, he said, must rob his thoughts of dear Maid Marian ; prudence, if nought else, bade him keep eyes off Nan Butler for a day or two. So, notebook bulging his coat pocket and pencil neatly sharpened, Frank made for the hills and fell to spying out the land.

Over a big tract of lough-side country (wherein is much bad land, and a thriving race of peasants famous for fishing and poaching, and speaking a soft and oily dialect), Frank flashed his eagle eye. Within the broad bounds of Orange Gorteen he found much wherewith to make his pencil dance. Through the land of Emo he passed, making note of its pleasant aspect, its beauties of lake and river, its castle called Rhamus frowning from a rush-clad hill. Along Thrasna river he went, and felt his fountain of poetry rise a-bubbling. Bilboa and its whins and rushes struck his soul as with a hand of gloom. Away inland towards the stately mountain, across the wind-swept bogs, over the melancholy hills, he set his face ; strode along sandy roads, splashed down muddy lanes, strove through squelching fields, followed his fancy here, there and everywhere.

And everywhere he was made welcome. Every one seemed to know him, to have heard of him ; every one

remembered his father and had stories without end to tell of that roaring blade. People stopped him on the road. Aw, how the divil was he? Aw, sirs, but they were glad to have grip of Frank Barry's hand. Men hailed him from the field. Aw, sure, was it passin' them like that Mr. Barry would be after? Now, now! From the houses women came running and wiping their hands on their aprons. An' was it Mr. Frank himself? An' wasn't it in Mr. Frank was comin', just to rest his legs? The children passed him with downcast eyes, then turned to gaze open-mouthed at his coat tails. Sometimes, one, not knowing Frank sufficiently to dare venture speech, would lift his caubeen; again, a woman in like straits would glance admiringly at his handsome face and duck a curtsy as to his Lordship himself. Girls (for these Frank's eye was tenderly keen) hurried past with averted gaze; only to twist chin to shoulder and follow him with dancing eyes. Men praised him; women flattered him: with all he was a darlint boy. And Frank took it all very good-humouredly; gave word for word and joke for joke; laughed with the men, chatted with the women, gave the girls fine flashes of his daring eyes; altogether had a pleasant time of it and a memorable. Yes, Frank Barry walked something of a hero through that little while; had pride in the buzz of excitement which followed his steps, thought he was a great man entirely, and as clever a fellow with note book and pencil as ever splashed mud in an Irish boreen.

Well, perhaps he was.

So, for a few days, it was with Frank Barry. Then, one night, down came a gentle wind from the

west, and hurriedly old Winter gathered his tattered skirts and fled for the frozen north. Softly broke the morning, and in her glory over the hills young Spring came tripping. Down into the valleys she flashed her magic. At whirl of her wings the trees and hedges awoke. Beneath the scamper of her feet old Earth lay thrilling; up to the sun and the blue floor of heaven went the jubilation of her song; the grass stirred, the birds piped out, in the heart of man was gladness and in his blood new life.

The change was blessed. The peasants came to their doors and drank the sweet freshness. Ould winter was gone at last, himself and his pack of troubles, said they; he was gone, the ould villain, and God be thanked. Children, on their way to school, shouted till the hills rang. Men paced the fields and fell to planning, eager to make ready for the spring's quickening, and the summer's fashioning, and the autumn's fruition. Suddenly, almost while you winked, you might say, the whole face of things had changed. Instead of silence was bustle and life, instead of mists a wondrous clearness; the fields were empty no longer; you heard carts clanking, cattle lowing, horses neighing, noise and life everywhere. It was great; it was blessed.

In the yard of Ryfield house, old Hugh stood looking towards the mountain and rubbing his hands together. This was the weather, sir; this was what he had been hungering for. No longer now might the land lie fallow. The spring had come, sir; the blessed spring. Long, bright days, long, bright sunshine, himself working hard and the weather helping harder: these were what he wanted. Man, how he

liked that morning; the smell of it, the feel of it. He thanked God Almighty he was alive; he prayed his Maker he might see many more days such as that.

But, Frank, where was Frank? In bed, Hugh warranted. Sally, Sally; let Sally hurry Mr. Frank up and out. Ah, here he was at last.

"Come here, sir," called Hugh. "Come here and get the blears from your eyes in this breeze from the mountain. There's a sight for ye, me London bred sonny; there's something better than smoke and fog to greet ye o' mornin's. Look at that stretch of country away across there to the mountain; fields an' fields, an' hills an' hills, all shinin' an' laughin'. D'ye see how fresh everything is? D'ye see? D'ye see? Man, Frank, isn't it all great?"

"It's beautiful," said Frank. "I knew well when I woke this morning that spring was here."

"Ay," said Hugh; then slapped Frank on the back. "By the holy poker," cried he; "but I think I could fight ye—ay, an' whack ye, this grand mornin'. Man, I feel I could jump over the hedge there! An' me gone sixty. Me an' ould man, ye might say. Och, och, Frank," said Hugh, with a quick change of tone, "it's a mercy to be young. Make the most o' your youth, me son; make the most o' your youth. Away in, now, an' have your breakfast; an' hurry out again, me son, hurry out to this blessed mornin'."

"I will, uncle," said Frank, turning. "And you'll fight me when I come, mind."

"Ah, away wi' ye," shouted Hugh. "Away an' fight Sally."

Leisurely Frank went in; with his precious notebook propped before him against the teapot, leisurely

made his breakfast ; leisurely put on his hat, at last, lit his pipe and strolled out upon the lawn.

Yes, it was a beautiful morning. How did it impress him ? His spirits were not boisterously bucolic (good phrase that), like those of Hugh. No. He did not feel ecstatic. No. It was only your materialist, your agriculturist, who ran riot in the spring. He felt just poet'ically impressed. Yes. He was in the humour to compose a sonnet, an ode, or something. He must add some notes on Spring to the long list of his observations. All things were grist to the novelist's mill. Nature's secrets ? Pooh ! Nature had no secrets for him. That sky was a lovely blue. How well dame Nature always mixed her colours ; no bungling, no smearing. He must note that. Soon the thorn would be budding. Why, actually the buds were already in sight ! How curious. That old oak over there, so gnarled and battered, how strange to think that all was turmoil beneath his tough bark. Ah, that must be noted. Really, the country looked wonderfully well. That landscape wanted only a flash of water to relieve its monotony. By the way, he wondered how the lake looked that morning. Perhaps if he strolled to the shore he might find something worthy the seeing and noting ; something less monotonous than those eternal fields. Let him stroll.

Behold, then, Frank Barry once more sitting solitary on the stones of Garvagh pier. His note-book is open, pencil in his fingers. Up and down the lake he looks, here and there. In the sky he seeks inspiration—for a note—in the broad waters, in the gleam of distant shore. He peers among the willows,

hearkens to the music of stone and wavelet; presently turns his eye—not for the first time, but now lingeringly, critically—on Inishrath.

There are the barren fields running up from the shore; there are the trees, and their shadow like a black ring in the water; there is the Butlers' cottage. Quite picturesque it looks, nestled there in the bosom of the hills. Ha! There goes big John, hands in pockets, shoulders slouched, hat on the back of his head; goes shambling along, without care or purpose, just lounging about in the sunshine and waiting for some one to call him to the ferry. There he goes across the garden, Nan's garden, out to the lane and away up to the hill crest; now he sits down, lights his pipe, lets his eyes wander over his demesne. Happy John. Ha! There goes Mrs. Sarah across the garden, carrying a can; now she is at the quay; now dips her can and shuffles back. He dislikes Mrs. Sarah, does Frank; she is sly, is sleek, is cringing. Hello. Frank springs to his feet. Who is this, coming across the garden, something big on her back, a pair of oars across her shoulder, a basket on her arm? It is Nan. So. Nan has her jacket and cap on. Nan comes down the lane; reaches the pier, places her burdens in a cot, jumps in, unships oars, makes a stroke and is off. The cot turns, the oars flash; away Nan goes, hugging the island—away from Garvagh. Frank waves an arm. The cot sails on. Frank waves both arms. The oars stop; the cot turns and steadily comes for Garvagh. Frank sits down; begins humming a tune. How beautiful is the morning, thinks he; how gloriously beautiful it has grown within the last five minutes.

The cot swung to the pier. Frank swept a bow and smiled.

"Good-morning, Nan. I hope you're not very angry with me?"

Of course Nan was not angry; why should she be?

"I've brought you out of your way, Nan, and I've brought you here; and now, 'pon my word, I don't know why I did it, except just to speak to you."

Nan laughed; looked at Frank, then at the point of an oar.

"Sure that's no great sin," said she.

Frank put a foot on the end block of the cot.

"I'm forgiven, then? Good. And now tell me where you are off to?"

"I came to ferry you, Mr. Frank. But before that 'twas off for turf I was."

Frank put his other foot on the end block of the cot

"And is it far to the turf?"

"It's a good piece. It'll take me an hour. An' I'll not be back, maybe, till sunset."

Frank puckered his lips; looked away. "Ho, ho," said he. For a minute he stood considering; then: "Should I be very much in the way, Nan, if I came with you?"

Nan flushed; quickly began raising difficulties. Ah, Mr. Frank'd be welcome, but sure what would he be doin' in a turf bog? Sure, 'twas a dreary, God-for-saken place. Sure, 'twas a dirty old tub the cot was; an' 'twas full of turf she would be coming back. Sure, what would Mr. Frank be doing for want of his dinner? "Come an' welcome, sir, come an' welcome," was Nan's last word; "but sure—"

Boldly Frank stepped into the cot.

"I'm coming, Nan," said he. "Aw, but sure I just am. Now then, off we go." Nan sat still, fixedly staring at the water. "I can't take an oar," Frank continued, "but then you'll have the pleasure of rowing me. So there are compensations on both sides, you see."

"Aw, sure," said Nan, still with her eyes on the water.

"Look." Frank sat down. "I'll sit here and be a good boy. I promise you I will; and I promise to do nothing worse than talk to you and look at you."

Nan said nothing. Frank sat looking at her. What was her difficulty? Was it the proprieties? Was it Ted Ross?

"A penny for your thoughts, Nan," said he.

She glanced at him.

"They're worth little."

"Then they're not about me?"

"Well, they just are. I'm thinkin'—" Nan paused. "I'm thinkin' whether 'twas very wise o' me to turn back for ye."

"Ah." Frank rose. "Well, then, I'll keep you no longer. Good-bye, Nan." He turned to go.

But Nan dipped her oars and pulled away from the pier.

"Naw," said she. "Naw; ye can't go now. But—but what, in God's name, you'll do in that wilderness of a bog, I can't tell."

Frank sat down again.

"Leave that till afterwards," said he. "Meanwhile, do look at me, Nan, and don't be cross with me."

"Sure, but I'm not cross," came back. "Aw, not at all. But sure you'll be starved before sunset."

Frank laughed.

"Nan, Nan," said he, "you're the most artless girl I ever knew. Do you know what any woman in a thousand, except yourself, would do if she were sitting in your place?"

"I dunno."

"Well, she'd row straight for Inishrath and take up a third passenger."

"An' who?"

"Her mother;" and at the word Nan laughed.

"Aw, Lord sees," said she. "Lord sees! Well, mebbe so; but not if she was an Irishwoman, I'm thinkin'. Aw, no. Thank God, things like that don't bother me. Ah, dear no; dear no." All at once she stopped rowing and leant forward on her oars. "Tell ye what, Mr. Frank, wouldn't it be a good notion for me to land an' put something more in the basket."

"To eat?"

"Surely."

"What's there already, Nan?"

"Aw, only a trifle. No, no, Mr. Frank," said Nan, as Frank pulled the basket towards him, "don't open it. There's only bread and milk, an' a grain o' tay, an' potaties to roast when I light the fire—an' that's all."

"Would you share, Nan?"

"Aw, faith would I, to the last morsel. But sure that kind o'—o' feedin' would choke ye."

"Then we'll choke together, my dear," said Frank. "On you go."

Nan bent to the oars. The cot ran quickly towards Inishrath. The sun had strengthened; the air struck warm; under high heaven was a great hum and thrill of life. Frank lay back, rested head on hands and looked here and there across the lake. It was glorious. Never had he seen a more beautiful day, never looked out upon a lovelier scene. Seldom before in his life had he been happier, in better spirits. He felt the spring working in him; was in the mood to sing and shout. Curious, that the day should so change. In Ryfield, standing on the lawn, he had felt clean and strong—and all the rest; now he felt joyful. Why was it? Was it because he had escaped from the tyranny of the fields, the thralldom of the clay, and had come out into a larger air, a wider range of vision? Or was it simply that spring had gripped him? Or was it that Nan, the gentle, soft-spoken Nan, was near him? He looked at her, as she sat swinging to and fro, at her sweet face with its bloom of health and youth, her wavy black hair, her broad brow, her lips slightly parted, full and rosy red.

“ Oh, Nan, Nan,” murmured he.

“ Were ye speakin, Mr. Frank?”

“ No, no, Nan. What a day this is,” said Frank, looking heavenwards.

“ Ah, yes. For long an’ long I’ve been lookin’ for this to come. Thank God the winter’s past.”

“ You like the spring, Nan?”

“ I just love it. There’s no time o’ the year like it. When I woke this mornin’ ’twas like a child I felt, that fresh an’ bright. Ah, yes.”

“ And you feel so still?”

" Ah, I do. Sure it's wonderful to think o' what's comin'; everything alive at last, an' growin', an' growin'."

" And the flowers blooming in your little garden over there, Nan?"

" Ah yes; sure it's blessed."

The cot neared Inishrath. Around its shore the water lay peacefully in the black shadow of the trees. Up from the lake ran the bare ribs of the fields. Hardly a stone's throw away, so it seemed, stood the cottage of the Butlers', white, low, picturesque; in front was Nan's garden; down from it ran the lane between the trees and hedges: all was still and very beautiful.

Frank clasped his knees with his hands; bent forward and let his eyes feast on Nan's sweet self. To and fro her body swayed with a steady rhythmic swing. Now her face was nearer his, and her raven hair and broad brow; now it was drawn back, and the strong roundness of her throat and full oval of her face showed clear. Out shot her hands, and she was bending towards him as if to whisper something; back she leant again, and, as if beckoning him, as if drawing him towards her, slowly her hands withdrew.

" Ah, Nan, Nan," murmured Frank. " Nan, Nan."

Quickly she looked at him.

" I'm listenin'."

" I didn't speak, Nan."

" Faith, an' it's yourself then," laughed she, " must be gettin' into the ould wives' way o' talkin' to yourself."

" I was thinking, Nan."

"An' a bad habit too."

Frank laughed.

"My thoughts don't interest you, then?"

"Surely. An' me a woman!"

"Well, I was wondering, Nan, whether it *was* wise of you to turn back for me."

"Ay? Well, it's too late now to repent!"

"Yes, it's too late. Look." Frank waved a hand towards Inishrath. "There's the lord of the isle taking his ease and the sun."

For a stroke Nan rested on her oars.

"Ah, poor father," she said; "poor father. God knows he's a curious mortal. All day long he'd like to squat up there an'smoke. Sure it's heaven's pity he's not a walkin' gentleman."

"Would he be happier then?"

"Ah, mebbe. Mebbe not. I often think he's just as well as people that go wearin' their hearts out, kickin' about the world."

"Just as well," said Frank.

The cot went on; rounded the Inishrath shore; came to a stone ditch that ran a little way into the lake: and there, hugging his up-gathered knees, sat John Butler. His face shone like a beaconlight; his hat was tilted over his eyes: steadily he watched the cot come near; slowly took the pipe from his mouth and began chuckling.

"Aw, very well," called he; "very well. Just wait, the pair o' ye; just wait. Ted Ross 'll be comin' the night, an' then—aw, be the powers, Frank, it's flittered ye'll be."

"Good man, John," shouted Frank.

"Ay, indeed. An' good man, Frank, say I. Aw,

it's you's the playboy, Frank, sittin' collogin' wi' another man's sweetheart."

" Ah, whisht, father, wi' ye," said Nan. "It's ashamed ye should be."

" Ay. Ashamed, indeed; an' so I am, troth. Where are ye goin', Frank? What the divil are ye doin' in that ould cot?"

" Off for turf, John."

" For turf? Off to the bog? Ah, quit your foolishness! Why, man, it's worse nor the desert of Sahara. Come in here wi' ye."

" Not this time, John; some other day."

" Come in an' have a crack, I tell ye."

" The siren 's in the wrong place, John," called Frank, and looked at Nan.

" Ah, whisht wi' ye."

Frank waved his hand and called good-bye. On went the cot and left John shouting on the shore of his kingdom.

" You heard what your father said, Nan?" asked Frank in a while.

" Ah, I did. Sure he'd give his eye to have a talk wi' ye."

" I don't mean that. I mean what he said about you and me, Nan."

" Ah, *that*." A flush spread on Nan's cheek. " Ah, 'deed I did. But sure father's good at the bleatherin'. He'd talk like that, when the humour's on him, to the King an' Queen. Ah, 'deed ay; 'deed ay."

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH Nan toiling at the oars, and Frank lying back at his ease, laughing, singing, admiring nature, admiring Nan ; with beauty at the prow, so to speak, and pleasure at the helm, the cot went on ; left Inishrath and John the lord thereof ; ran between the long lines of the woods and below the ramparts of the hills ; shot past this little island and that—homes, most of them, of the rabbit and the gull ; sent the clank of oars into many a loughside cottage, calling forth flocks of tattered children, and barefoot women, and shaggy-bearded men ; turned at last up a narrow river, and came, in a while, to one still narrower, a glorified ditch you might say, whose mouth gaped ruggedly in the heather-covered bank.

Nan pulled in her oars, rose, and fixing a pole in the river bottom, deftly shot the cot's head into the ditch.

"Here we are," said she, and pushing at the pole came from thwart to thwart towards Frank. "Here we are at last ; and glad ye must be, I'm thinkin'."

"Why glad, Nan?" asked Frank, making glad his eyes with the sight of her face and figure.

"Ah, just because." Nan pulled at the pole and turned to fix it anew. "Ah, just because," said she over her shoulder, "I was thinkin' it possible in time to get tired even of laziness."

Frank laughed and rose.

"I stand reprov'd," said he, with a mock bow. Again Nan turned and from thwart to thwart came towards him. "Allow me, madam," said he, stepping forward. With one hand he caught the pole, Nan's wrist with the other. "Now apologise, m^{rs}."

Nan drew back.

"For what, Mr. Barry?"

"For—for—" Her face was close to his; her breath warm on his cheek. "For calling me lazy, Nan." Quickly he clutched at her other wrist; missed it; the next moment was sprawling across the gunwale, and Nan was laughing down at him from the bank of the ditch. As well and as quickly as he could Frank recovered himself; steadied himself with the pole, and stood upright.

"Thank you, Miss Butler," said he. His voice found a sudden note of piteousness. "Nan—Nan, why did you do that? You know I was almost in."

Steadily Nan looked down at him; a hand on her lips, her eyes dancing.

"Aw, it's one way of apologisin', Mr. Barry. An' now what are ye goin' to do?"

Frank plucked the pole from the mud and mounted a thwart.

"Oh, I can manage," said he. "Don't mind me, please. I can manage." He fixed the pole; began walking the thwarts. Bump went the cot against this bank. He pulled at the pole. Back swung the cot against that bank. "Damn," muttered he, plucking at the pole; up it came suddenly, the cot lurched, down sprawled Frank Barry. "Damn," cried he again, uprising in his wrath. From the bank came a

sound of laughter. "What the deuce," cried Frank, "are you laughing at?"

Nan uncovered her face; looked at him between her hands.

"Aw, Lord," she said. "Aw, Lord! Aw, heavenly hour, I'll die, I'll die!"

"Oh, you may well laugh," began Frank; all at once threw down the pole and himself began laughing. "Serve me right for a conceited ass. Come back, Nan; come and I promise to be good."

"Not I."

"Then——"

"Give us grip of an oar." And with Frank holding the handle and Nan pulling at the blade, slowly the cot went on.

They came soon to a clump of willows that overhung the ditch bank; and there Nan halted.

"It's not kingdom come," said she; "but it's the best one can do. Throw us up that chain."

"Say, 'If you please, Frank.'"

Nan bobbed a curtsy.

"Throw us up that chain, may it please ye, Mr. Frank Barry." Up went the chain and was twisted round a stump. "I'm obliged to ye, Mr. Barry; an' now the creel an' basket, sir." Up went the creel and basket. "Thank ye kindly." Nan held out a hand. "An' now, if ye please, yourself."

Frank mounted the gunwale, scrambled up the bank, and still holding Nan's hand, looked into her eyes.

"Nan," said he, "ask my pardon."

"For what, Mr. Barry?"

"For your sauce, Miss Butler."

"Sauce? D'ye mean the kind they put on the goose, Mr. Barry?"

Frank laughed.

"Oh, you're incorrigible."

"An' what's that?"

"I could——" He meant saying he could kiss her. "What am I to do with you?"

"If you'd kindly carry that creel about twenty yards an' quit holdin' me hand, it's the best thing I know ye could do."

"The best, Nan; the very best?"

"Ah, quit wi' ye." And pulling away her hand, Nan snatched up the dinner-basket and set off across the heather.

Frank stood watching her till she reached and disappeared behind a willow clump that stood some distance out in the bog; then, slung the creel upon his back, and set out in her footsteps.

His path ran through thick heather and over rough turbary. Here and there the bogholes gleamed darkly; here and there lay gnarled stumps, piles of mud, broken heaps of turf. Farther off, were willow clumps, small and sparse; on his right the river glittered; behind, far beyond the ditch, stood a low rampart of hills; on his left, miles and miles away, ran a long mountain; far in front were hills again; and between all these, spreading out and away, lying flat as a lake, receiving the sweet gifts of spring and sun with a grim dreariness, a sullen indifference, lay the great barrenness of turf bog. All was strangely quiet there. A smell of heather, of peat smoke, came gratefully. Close by, a girl was turning peat upon a bank; half a mile away, a woman trudged

beneath a creel of scraws towards the river; but from these or another came no sound. Not a bird flew over the heather; like a place of graves the great bog lay in its loneliness.

Frank came to the willow clump; there found Nan on her knees, patiently striving to fan a pile of sticks and peat fibre into a flame. He threw down the creel.

"Well," said he, "this is a wilderness of a place. Your father libelled the Sahara, Nan."

"Ay?" Nan stooped, began coaxing the flame with her breath.

"This neighbourhood would make a good site for a convict prison," Frank went on, looking about him.

"Ay?" Nan went on blowing.

"It's mighty curious, isn't it, to think that once a great forest grew here between the hills, that the river over there is all that is left of the lake that once spread——"

"Quick," cried Nan. "Now I've got it. Hurry with the dry turf there. Hurry, hurry, when the flame's good. That's it," said she, placing the turf all round the tiny fire; "that's it. There's nothin' in the world can cheer your heart like a good blaze. An' now;" she stood upright; "now for work."

Nan pulled off her jacket, hung it on a willow branch and went out into the heather. Not far off, was a turf bank and boghole; and lying here and there, a few on the bare bank, the rest among the heather, were small heaps of turf, some broken and scattered, some arranged in rows to catch the wind, some but the remains of clamps that had long since been taken away. Among these lay Nan's work.

At home, she explained, their winter's stock of peat had nearly run out. And now, perforce, they had to fall back upon the best they could get. Soon, of course, would be turf-cutting time; in a couple of months, please God, the turf-house would be full again; meanwhile, the pot must be kept boiling and so——

"So," said Frank, "you must needs come here to slave."

"Ah, no; sure some one must keep things going."

"Your father, Nan, is yonder on Inishrath, sleeping no doubt in the sunshine."

"An' much good may it do him."

"Couldn't you have stayed and he come?"

"Ah, 'deed ay," laughed Nan. "'Deed ay, an' see him comin' home the morrow mornin' wi' six wet turf in the creel an' all the dry ones left behind. Ah, no," said she, stooping to her task. "Ah, no."

Deftly she picked the driest of the turf from a heap and flung them on one side. Quickly from heap to heap she passed, flinging here wet and there dry as she went; right and left her arms flashed out; as lissom as a reed before the wind, her body rose and fell.

Frank stood watching her; after a while, buttoned his jacket, turned up his cuffs, and bent his back.

"You don't mind my helping you?" said he, picking up a turf.

"Ah, no; of course I don't; but sure——"

"Sure what, Nan?"

"You'll hurt your hands."

Frank rested palms on knees and looked round.

"You're laughing at me again, Nan."

Nan stopped working.

"Laughin'," said she. "Well, God knows I'm not. Arrah, at what?"

"I thought," said Frank; "I thought perhaps you were mocking——"

"I never mock."

"I know it, Nan; I know it. 'Twas the wrong word. I thought—I fancied you meant to imply I was only a poor mortal and not fit to do a stroke of honest work."

Nan stood upright.

"Lord sees," said she. "Think o' ye gettin' all that out of a simple remark! Sure I meant just what I said: that the turf and the heather'll hurt your hands. Why, you're worse nor father."

"I am," said Frank, with a smile. "I am. But tell me, Nan; do you think your hands were ever made for such work?"

"I—I dunno."

"Well, I'm sure they were not; nor were you made for it."

"Ay?" said Nan.

"To think of *you*," Frank spread his hands in a sudden flutter of indignation; "to think of you having to come here to slave like a cotton planter; to bend your back for hours at a time over things like that;" Frank kicked viciously at a turf; "to have your hands torn and scratched—why, it's simply disgraceful."

Nan had been watching Frank, with something of wonder lying in her eyes; now she looked away from him across the bog.

"But, sure, other people do the same," said she.

"You're different from other people, Nan."

"An' how?"

"In every way," said Frank; then suddenly he thought him whether he were acting wisely. What he had said, what he was about to say, was true every whit; still, of what avail to pour disillusion, even if it were truth, into the clear well of Nan's simplicity. Why make her discontented with her fate? Her lot was fixed. She was only a colleen; she might have been a lady; and she was destined to jog through life at the heels of a yokel. If Frank could have his way; ah, if he only could. . . . "You are vastly different from other people, Nan," said he. "Am I the first who has ever told you that?"

"The very first."

"Has Ted never told you that?"

Nan flushed, looked away.

"Ted niver says such things to me."

"Never admires you, Nan?"

"Aw, he does; but sure—"

"Never said you were the handsomest girl in the parish, and the sweetest, and the best? Did Ted never say that, Nan?"

Nan looked up with twinkling eyes.

"Ah, quit wi' ye," said she; "is it turn me head you'd do? Tell me now, yourself. Is that the way you'd talk, supposin' you were Ted?"

Frank looked away. Much good his effort after wisdom had done! Supposing he were Ted? Oh, those eyes, that brow!

"If I were Ted, Nan," said he, his voice quivering, "that's not half what I'd say."

“ Not half? Not half?” Nan stood looking at the heather, her hands twisting a corner of her apron. “ Not half?” said she, suddenly looking up. “ What time might it be, Mr. Frank? Aw, mercy me! Sure it’s time the dinner was roastin’;” and off she ran towards the fire.

Frank sat down beside the heap of dry turf. Was he acting wisely? he asked himself again. A minute ago, he had been perilously near making love to Nan; even now he felt perilously near making love to her again. She was a dear girl. Suppose he had obeyed the impulse of that moment, had opened his arms and taken her within them; had told her all she did not know, would never know except from him? What then? Would Nan have listened? No; he was sure she would not. But suppose he persisted in telling her, persisted with open arms? What then? He knew. But a minute ago he had seen something in her face, a look of discovery, a flash of insight, which told him, better than words could tell, how soon and how readily he might rifle the simple treasures of her heart.

Should he tell her? What madness! How could he be so weak? Was not Nan bound? Had not he his Marian, his dear Maid Marian? He must fight this passing fancy, trample it under foot. He must be wise—if only for Nan’s sake.

They should be good friends, be like brother and sister: that and no more. He must be strong. He lay back on the heather and vowed by high heaven that he would be strong; and high heaven laughed in face of the sun.

In a while, Nan came back from the fire; at once,

without a word, went on with her work. She seemed pensive, looked grave and pale. Frank took his place beside her. He was resolved to be strong. He kept his face from Nan and did not speak. Side by side they moved on through the heather. Frank's back grew weary; his head swam; the turf bruised his fingers, the heather scratched and stung them. He stumbled on. He must be a man. But, heavens, to think of enduring such ills through a livelong day. Were they not nearly finished? Was it not time for dinner? He stood upright.

"I'm beaten, Nan," said he. "My bones are crying out."

Nan glanced at him.

"I was expectin' that," said she.

"But you—how can you endure it, Nan?"

"Aw, use is second nature."

Nan worked on. Frank stood watching her. Why did she look pensive? Why did she not talk? Was it because of what he had said?

Nan straightened her back and sighed.

"There," said she. "Thank God, that's all done. An' now, mebbe, the dinner's ready." She moved towards the fire. Frank took her by the arm.

"What's the matter, Nan?"

"Nothin', Mr. Frank."

"But there is. You've hardly spoken a word these twenty minutes."

"I was workin'."

"But working and talking often go together."

"One can't be always gabblin'."

"Look at me, Nan," said Frank. "You're not thinking of what I said a while ago?"

She looked up, not very boldly; then stepped towards the fire.

"Well, if ye ask me," said she. "I was just thinkin' if the dinner was spoilt."

CHAPTER IX.

AMONG the willows, the fire had burnt low ; in a soft pile the white ashes lay smouldering ; beneath them the dinner was roasting. Nan cut an osier, twisted it into the shape of tongs, drew a potato from the ashes, squeezed it gently between the folds of her apron, and finding it cooked, gave word to Frank that all was ready.

On the windward side of the fire, full in the glare of the sun, Nan and Frank sat down on the bare peat bank to their simple meal. There were plenty of potatoes and they were good—dry, large, very hot. There was salt enough for two in the screw of paper, milk enough, if well husbanded, in the can ; the heel of a soda cake stood in the basket ; for both there was enough, of its kind, and to spare.

Two at a time, Nan picked the potatoes from the ashes and laid them on the basket lid ; from hand to hand, not without laughter and a deal of bustle and blowing of hot fingers, they tossed them ; then shot them from the charred skins, dipped them in the salt, ate, sipped at the milk, and were thankful.

The bank was strewn with hollow skins ; here lay Frank's hat, cuffs, pipe ; there hung Nan's cap, jacket, apron ; through the willows the wind puffed softly, overhead the sun rode gloriously, all round stretched the great desolation of brown bogland.

Said Frank, having swallowed a fiery morsel: "That beat your father's whisky, Nan." Nan laughed, choked a little, answered: "An' *that* nearly beat his daughter." Said Frank again: "This finger blowing seems a great waste of breath." Answered Nan: "It's better wastin' it on good potaties than on bad talk." Said Nan, after a while: "Sure such victuals as this must be as strange to ye as flesh meat to a Connaught man." Answered Frank, in the words of the Scriptures: "' *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.*' " Said Nan, once more, with a look at the milk and salt: "Well, there's a roughness (meaning a sufficiency) of victuals, but it's mighty poor kitchen I'm offerin' ye." "What may *kitchen* mean in these parts?" asked Frank. Answered Nan: "Aw, just a trifle to give things a relish." "The bloom on the lips of Beauty?" suggested Frank. "Ay, or the sugar after physic," said Nan. "Well," said Frank, and drained his cup, "if the kitchen didn't do its duty, at least the sauce was good." "Is it hunger you're meanin'?" asked Nan. "I do," answered he. "Aw yis," came back. "Aw yis; you'll never have to search far for that kind o' sauce in these parts. The Lord sends it in plenty." Said Frank, once again: "Well, truly can I say, Nan, that never have I dined more wisely." "Nor worse," added Nan; and that was the last word of table talk that fell.

Nan cleared away the remains of the feast; made up the fire, and took her place beside the dinner basket. Frank watched her for a while; then, lit his pipe and stretched himself on his side.

"You must be very glad, Nan, to see the last of the winter?"

Nan gathered up her knees, clasped them with her hands; looked steadily at the fire.

"Ah, ye may well say that," answered she. "I'm gladder of only one thing."

"Yes. And what's that, Nan?"

"Just to see the spring comin'."

"Ah! What is it you like most in the spring, Nan?"

"Most? I dunno. I like iverything—iverything. But mebbe I like best to feel alive again, an' to see the life comin' back all round me."

"Yes? And the winter makes you feel half dead, I suppose?"

"Ah, it does."

"What on earth do you do, Nan, all those dreary months, there on that dreary island? You must feel horribly lonesome?"

"Ah, I do—sometimes."

"When Ted's not there, for instance?"

Nan flushed; looked at her hands.

"Ay, indeed," she answered. "Ay, indeed."

"You're very fond of Ted, I'm sure?" Frank kept on, in that ingenuous way he had.

Nan flushed deeper; began twining and untwining her fingers.

"Ah, I am," said she, very softly.

"Tell me, Nan," asked Frank again; "how comes it that sometimes you wear Ted's ring and sometimes don't wear it? You're without it now, I see."

Slowly Nan turned.

"Ted's ring? Arrah, what ring?"

"Well, the one you wore that afternoon in the little parlour at home."

A smile crept across Nan's face; again she looked at the fire.

"Sure that wasn't Ted's ring at all," she answered. "I bought that meself one day from a peddler. I only wear it now an' again, just for sport."

"For sport?" repeated Frank. "Then you didn't wear it that day—because I had come?"

Nan's eyes began to twinkle.

"Well, of all the questions! Because you had come, indeed! Sure it's little ye were expectin' o' me, Mr. Frank Barry."

Frank laughed; rapped the ashes from his pipe on the toe of his boot.

"You're severe, Nan. I thought perhaps you wished me to see that you and Ted were engaged. Did you?" said Frank, looking at her.

"Aw, *that*," answered Nan. "No; I didn't. I meant nothin'—nothin' but a piece o' vanity. An' sure— Sure it's strange, anyway, to hear ye talkin' about Ted an' me in that way. What engagement, as ye call it, would ye have between us?"

"You're not engaged to him, then?" asked Frank, quickly, solicitously.

"He asked me," answered Nan, simply; "an' I didn't refuse him. That's all."

Frank lay back on the bank, clasped his hands beneath his head and looked up at the sky. Nan was free, he told himself in his strength; Nan was free. She had not refused Ted; that was all. The words meant much with Nan; still, what of them, supposing he himself were free?

What utter folly ! He must conquer this weakness ; must change his thoughts.

How long a time it seemed since the day he last saw Marian. Suppose she knew he were there all alone with Nan ? Ah, would she not be moody, be absurdly jealous. He knew it ; more than one experience he had had of that childish failing of hers. 'Twas pity ; for otherwise she was a dear girl, was Marian.

She was not in the least like Nan. Nan was simple ; Marian, complex. Nan was humorous ; Marian, a little sober. Nan was a plain country lass, a maid just as God had fashioned her ; Marian was a girl of mind, of training in the ways of the world. He liked both ; could almost love. . . .

How he was rambling ; how weak he was ! Let him firmly and finally change his thoughts. He turned his head ; there sat Nan watching him. Her eyes met his and fell. Frank shot upright. Ah, those eyes. He sank back on his elbow.

" Tell me, Nan," said he ; then stopped. " Wouldn't you like me, Nan," he went on, " to tell you something about London, about the streets and shops, and all that ? "

Nan looked up.

" I'd just love it."

" You've never been to a big city, have you ? " asked Frank, looking straight before him. " Dublin, or Belfast, or such like ? "

" Never," answered Nan. " Ah, how could I ? But sure, it's London I'd like to see above all. A wonderful place it must be ; wonderful."

" It is," said Frank ; and, once more stretching

himself along the bank, went on with his account of the wonders of London.

He spoke of the Thames, the great mysterious Thames, flowing so silently under its resounding bridges, past the busy wharves and the homes and fortunes of millions; and Nan, listening eagerly, declared that it was wonderful. He told of the roaring streets, described the buildings and monuments, the parks and commons; and Nan, listening open-eyed, affirmed again that it was wonderful. He closed his eyes, and pictured in glowing words the panorama of fashion and beauty which, in the season of seasons, displays itself to an admiring world marshalled in green chairs under the shadow of great Achilles; and Nan, listening almost breathless, declared that never had she heard the like. He smiled to himself, and made a bold raid on the shops; spoke of the marvels in millinery that hung behind acres of plate glass, of the wealth untold in diamonds, rubies, necklaces, bracelets, that glittered like the stars of heaven along the sombre streets; and Nan, her eyes shining in the wonderment of a child, cried out that her head was whirling, that it was great, great entirely. Then, tired of these airy flights, Frank entered the portal of the Museum, crossed the hall and stood Nan beneath the giant dome of the reading-room. With what feeling he now spoke, what pride, what bitterness. See, there, in that high-backed chair, among all those bent backs and pallid faces, there sits Frank himself, diving in mighty tomes for pearls wherewith to embellish his weary pen. Ah, the headaches he had endured in that weary seat, the heartache, the despair; and what triumphs had started there, what

fame! But perhaps he was wearying Nan? No. Really?

"You like to hear about my work, then?" asked Frank, turning his face for a moment from the glory of the sky; "you are interested in it, Nan?"

"Aw, yes," came back, in a voice not a little awestruck; "sure it's mighty strange to me."

"You like books, maybe?" said Frank again, smiling at his own knowingness and Nan's simplicity. "Perhaps you share my tastes, Nan?"

"Ah, I do," came back. "Ah, mebbe so; anyway, sure I like to hear ye."

So Frank once more looked up at the sky (whence came his inspiration, that morning, his inspiration and strength), and continued his talk; discoursed of his work, books, hopes, ambitions; after a while, came closer to reality and spoke of the great mission that had brought him to Ireland. He was contemplating a novel. He wanted to make observations of place, and character. Part of his story would have its scene in London; part, Frank waved his hand, somewhere under this very sky.

"Aw! Is it—is it put this," Nan looked about her, "in a book ye would?"

"Yes, Nan." Frank smiled. "Why not?"

"Sure—it's not this kind of place I ever read about in stories. Aw, no."

"What kind, then?"

"Ah, grander places than this."

Again Frank smiled.

"You've read about palaces, and mansions, and high-born ladies, Nan? Am I right?"

"Ay; something like that."

"Ah, yes. Well, I am content to leave such big game for the sport of others." Frank's voice swelled. "It's you, Nan, you and your equals, that I hope to see figuring in pages of mine. Yes; you and your equals, if such there be."

"Me?" Nan threw up her hands. "Me in a book? Ah sure, an' you're jokin', Mr. Frank?"

Frank shook his head. No; he was not joking. Still, leave that question for another occasion. He was anxious, just then, to introduce to Nan a few of the English characters, drawn from life, that were ready to take their places in this story of his.

First of all, there were two dear old people of his acquaintance whose portraits he meant to paint. In his book they were to be called the Roys; but in real life they went by the name of Dent. The heroine was their daughter Marian, Marian Dent—pretty name, was it not? But never mind her just now. Let Frank go back to the old people. There was not a better soul living than Mrs. Dent. She was small, swarthy, old-fashioned, sweet-tempered; the dearest body in the world. Her husband, Mr. Dent, was quite unlike her, but in himself was a worthy man. He had not much brain, nor education; but he was upright and good-hearted, with a fine gift of old-time courtesy; and by habit he was methodical as a machine. A fine character old Roy would make; a character which if properly drawn the world must proclaim great.

There was a pause. Frank lay smiling at his thoughts. Nan watched him for a while; then, said she:

"An' himself an' the wife'll be glad to see themselves in print, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, Nan. They know of my intention."

Another pause came; then, said Nan again:

"Ye must ha' seen the two o' them often enough to know them so well?"

"Yes; very often."

"An' the daughter, too?"

Frank looked round quickly.

"Why do you ask that, Nan?"

"Ah, just because—just me inquisitiveness. What kind might she be?"

Frank fixed his eyes on the sky, and smiled. Nan was not so simple as she looked. She had guessed how matters stood. Was she jealous of Marian? Or was she only inquisitive?

"She's like you, Nan, in some ways," he answered; "in most she's quite unlike you."

"An' you'll be marryin' her some day?"

Frank stared.

"Marrying her! Why, what on earth put that in your head, girl?"

"Ah, I just thought it. Sure it'd be only natural. But no odds. Tell us more about the story."

Frank went on telling about the story. There was still another character that he meant to paint from life. A Scotchman he was, his best friend. Rab was his name, Rab Lindsay. Ah, a good friend Rab had been. How many kindnesses had he done, how many faults forgiven. No matter. God bless old Rab! He wished he were sitting there with them; he wished Nan knew him; he wondered how the dear fellow was, and what he was doing? How well

he remembered their last evening together. He had never told Nan about that; well, let Nan listen.

"We were in my little den," said Frank, and sat upright on the peat bank, "smoking together and talking. Rab was down among the rickety springs of my single armchair, drawing at an old black pipe. I sat tilted back in my creaky chair, my feet on the mantelpiece, my head enveloped in clouds of smoke. All round," Frank waved his lily hands, "were my books, littered on the floor, heaped on the table, piled on the chairs; on the walls were some prints, cheap but good; there were portraits about, and manuscripts, and dumb-bells and foils—the usual sanctum of your literary man."

"An' is that the kind o' place ye live in, Mr. Frank?" asked Nan. Looking intently at him she sat, hands round her knees, body inclined a little forward.

"That's it, Nan. Oh, it's quite usual—quite usual. Well; after a while, *bang, bang* comes the postman's knock at the door below, and *thud* something falls on the hall floor. 'The inevitable,' said I to Rab, and laughed gaily enough; 'the inevitable,' said I, and waited with certitude. Presently, *tramp, tramp* comes a foot up the stairs and stops outside my den. 'Come in,' said I, at the knock; 'come in. Throw it on the table, Jane,' said I, without troubling to turn my head..."

"An' who may Jane be?" asked Nan.

"Oh, the servant, Nan.; only the servant. Well; a while passed. I was in the middle of a criticism of one of Mat. Arnold's books, when Rab, who usually says very little and observes a lot, leant

forward and took Jane's packet from the table. 'Oh, never mind, Rab,' said I; 'it's only that article back from *The Nineteenth Century*. It always falls like lead on the linoleum. Come; drop it; and lend me your ears.' I talked on for another while; then once more Rab interrupted me. 'Don't you think you'd better open this?' said he, lifting the letter from the table. 'No,' shouted I. 'May I open it?' asks Rab. 'And burn it,' snaps I; and fires away at my talk. Ten minutes more went. I was in the thick of an argument. Over leans Rab and hands me a document. 'Read that,' says he; 'and stop your cheap criticism.' I swore; clutched the paper; read—and jumped from my chair. What do you think the paper was, Nan?"

"I dunno. Tell me quick."

"Make a guess."

"A love letter."

Frank laughed.

"Ho, ho! Think of a love letter making one jump from one's chair. No, Nan; it wasn't. It was part of a communication from a firm of New Zealand solicitors, telling me that a distant relative had died, leaving me a small legacy of two hundred pounds."

"Aw," gasped Nan. "Two whole hundred pounds!"

"Yes; two whole hundred. It was a God-send. That money was useful, I can tell you. It will be useful yet," said Frank, and thought of his dear Maid Marian. "It is useful now," said he, rising. "Only for that money I should not be standing here this mortal minute."

"Ay," said Nan, half questioning.

"It gave me the opportunity to take a long-wished-for holiday," Frank went on. "I discussed the matter with—with Rab and others; decided to start; packed my bag; and here I am. Are you sorry that God-send came, Nan?" asked he, and poising on heel and toe looked down at her.

Nan rose.

"No," said she. "I'm not sorry. I'm— What'd be the time, Mr. Frank? Three o'clock! Aw, dear gracious, but the time has gone. It's wonderful!" And off Nan ran across the heather. And as Frank Barry followed her his thought was, that, had fate willed it, it were now the easiest thing in life to work love's bidding in that simple heart.

Again Frank bent among the heather. Very swiftly Nan worked; very little did Frank help her. She spoke but seldom; quite content she seemed to listen to Frank's chatter of London life and ways, of himself and his literary labours. Sometimes, in showing how best to lay a turf in position—they were now building wet peat into little wind-rows—her hands touched his; and Frank was glad, but Nan seemed sorry. Once or twice, as Frank questioned her in softest voice, she bit her lip, flushed charmingly, turned away; and only his heaven-sent strength kept Frank from enfolding her in his arms. Again—it was during tea-time, as they sat once more by the fire, among the willows, sipping tea from the same cup and breaking the same piece of bread, Frank almost forgot his vows to Marian, and almost made open love to Nan; and Nan, at the same moment, as if divining his heart, knelt quickly by the fire and fell to scattering the coals.

The sun was falling fast upon the mountain when Nan began carrying the dry turf across the heather; the shadows were very long when the last creelful was piled high above the gunwales; it was growing chill when Nan set the cot's head for Inishrath, and slowly (for the cot was well laden, and Frank, sitting beside Nan on the thwart, hindered more than he helped her) passed down the river, and along the misty shores of the lake.

And there again were the white cottages; and the eternal hills; and the lonely islands. And the water splashed from the oars, and rippled among the stones, and came flapping against the long sweep of the gunwales. And Frank talked and quoted, sang and romanced. And Nan laughed, and sang, and listened. Then dusk came. Along Inishrath went the resounding clank of the oars. Down fell the dark; out came the stars; and there, once more, was the pier, and the big ferry cot, and the light shining beyond the trees in the home of the Butlers.

"Tell me, Nan. Tell me. Have you enjoyed your day?"

The cot was swinging round. Frank's voice came low and soft. Nan sighed; for a moment rested on the oars.

"Ah, I have; I have. Never will I forget this day. Never."

"And you're not sorry, now, you came for me this morning? Are you, Nan?"

The cot struck the shore. Nan turned away her face.

"Are you, Nan? Answer me!"

And just then a heavy foot sounded on the pier.

CHAPTER X.

TED ROSS came down the pier; stopped opposite the thwart on which Nan and Frank were sitting; with his legs straddled and his hands deep in his pockets, looked down upon Nan.

"Ah, it's you, Ted?" Nan shipped an oar. "It's you?"

Ted stood silent.

"Good evening, Mr. Ross," said Frank, rising. "It's a beautiful night, isn't it?"

Ted did not answer. Nan picked up her basket and rose. Down the pier came the heavy tread of John Butler.

"So you're back, childer," said John. He stopped beside Ted. "Faith, an' good time, too. He'e's Ted an' meself's been watchin' the stars an' waitin' for ye this two blessed hours. Divil's in me, but till I heard the rattle of the oars, 'twas in a boghole I was 'feerd ye were, or mebbe down in the mud wi' the eels careerin' through your bones. An' for Ted here, it's as glum as a dead pig he's been; as glum an' as speechless."

"Ah, sure," laughed Nan. She held up the basket. "Here, Ted, take this from me."

Ted did not move. Frank sprang out upon the pier; turned and stretched a hand.

"Allow me, Nan." He gripped the basket; and

quickly Ted caught him by the shoulder, swung him round, and sent him staggering across the pier.

"I'll allow ye," cried Ted. "By God, I'll allow ye! Come out," he shouted to Nan. "Come out, I tell ye; an' quick."

John Butler stood dumfounded. Frank hung back on the farther side of the pier. Nan stepped from the thwart; and at once Ted clutched her arm.

"Come away," he said, through his teeth; "come away."

Nan faced him.

"Ted," said she, her voice low and tense; "Ted, in God's name, what's all this about?"

"Come away," was Ted's answer. "Come away wi' me." He pulled at her arm. Nan walked a step or two, then stopped.

"I'll not go," cried she; "I'll not go till ye tell me. It's disgraceful!"

Frank crossed the pier. John Butler laid his hand on Ted's shoulder.

"Ted, Ted, man," pleaded he. "Why, Ted, me son!"

"Arrah, stand back, ye ould fool," cried Ted, swinging from John's grip. "Can't ye mind your own business? Haven't I had enough o' your blasted talk this two hours? Come on," cried he, and pulled again at Nan's arm. "Come away wi' me."

"No, Ted," answered Nan. "No. Oh, it's disgraceful."

Frank stepped forward.

"One word with you, Mr. Ross," said he. "May I ask you before you go—"

Ted dropped Nan's arm; turned to face Frank.

"You'll ask me nothin'," he said. "You'll ask me nothin'."

"Then, can you ask me anything, Mr. Ross?"

"Ask you anything?" Slowly Ted repeated the words. "Ask *you*? Yes, I can." Ted came nearer Frank. "Who asked you, Mr. Frank Barry, to go stravagin' about the lake wi' Nan Butler all the day, an' to keep her out till this hour o' the night? Eh? Who asked ye to do that, Mr. Frank Barry?"

Nan gave a smothered cry. Said John: "For shame, Ted; aw, for shame, man." Frank drew back a step.

"Oh, it's that," said he.

"Answer me question," Ted persisted. "None o' your quibblin' here. Answer me question."

"I will. I asked myself."

"Ay. Ye asked yourself. Just so. Ye were at a loss for somethin' to do, Mr. Barry, this fine spring day; so, to amuse yourself, ye must come where you're not wanted, an' go where y. had no business, an' lure a decent girl away——"

"Ah, for shame, Ted Ross," shouted John Butler. Nan stood silent, but with galloping breath, beside her dinner basket.

"Will ye whisht," cried Ted, turning to John; "an' mind your own affairs."

"Aw, shame on ye, Ted Ross," shouted John again. "Shame on ye!"

Frank raised his hand.

"Just one word," said he. "Will you come a little way up the lane, Mr. Ross, and have a talk with me?"

"Naw," answered Ted. "Damme, if I do."

"Then suppose," Frank went on, "we meet to-morrow and talk over things?"

"Suppose," Ted broke in, "I wipe ye across the mouth where ye stand."

The words came hot and fierce. Again Nan smothered a cry. John Butler broke into a babble of remonstrance. Frank drew a long breath, clenched his hands; stepped forward.

"Suppose you do," said he, as coolly as he might. "I'm ready."

Ted raised his hand.

"For two pins I would," said he; "for two pins I'd break the mouth on ye."

"Do it," said Frank; and the next moment Nan had Ted by the arms, and was between him and Frank, and was imploring him to be quiet.

"Come away," she cried. "Ah, God's mercy, come away!"

He struggled hard, fumed and swore; then Nan raised her face.

"Ted," said she; and with the word he dropped his arms, turned and slowly went with Nan along the pier.

The two left the shore; passed through the trees, struck the lane; and midway between the lake and the green gate Nan stopped.

"So this is what you've done!" cried she.

Ted walked a step; paused, stood looking between the hedges.

"This is what ye think of me, Ted Ross!"

Ted kept silent.

"This is how ye show your respect for our friends, an'"—

Ted wheeled round.

"Friends!" said he, bitterly. "Ye call that man a friend? Tell me," said he, clutching at Nan's arm, "how did he know ye were goin' for turf the day? Who told him? Was it you? Answer me, Nan Butler. Was it you?"

"It wasn't. It was pure chance."

"Chance! Tell me, I say; was it you?"

Nan made as if to walk on; but Ted held her back.

"Answer me! Answer me quick, Nan Butler."

"I have answered ye, Ted Ross. I've told ye the truth. Truth!" cried Nan, with a stamp of her foot. "That I should have me word doubted, an' by you!"

A pause came. Breathing heavily, Nan stood looking up the hill. Ted hung his head for a minute.

"Well I believe ye, then," said he.

"I thank ye."

"See here, Nan," Ted went on; "ye may think me a fool. Mebbe I am. God knows. But the devil's been in me this two hours. I can't help it. Come now; what'd ye think yourself supposin' I was to go for a whole day with a lassie, an' come home with her, an' be sittin' beside her? What'd ye think, now?"

"I'd think nothin'." Nan turned on the lane.

"What is it you're thinkin' of me?" she asked.

"I heard ye singin' together down the lake."

"Well?"

"He was whisperin' to ye just before ye landed."

"Well?"

"What was he whisperin'? What did he say?"

"What d'ye accuse me of?" cried Nan.

"Answer me, Nan Butler. What was he sayin'?"

"I'll not answer ye. I scorn to answer ye."

"What did he say to ye comin' home? What did he say to ye all day long? Tell me this." Ted's voice fell husky. He plucked at Nan's sleeve. "Did he make love to ye?"

"I scorn to answer ye."

There came to Nan, as she stood there beneath the stars with Ted's hand on her arm, a quick memory of many things that Frank had said to her that day, of many looks he had given, of many things that had puzzled her a little, and vexed her, and—yes, gladdened her a little: and, with the memory, she paused and dropped her eyes. Had Mr. Frank made love to her? Had he? Had she encouraged him in any way? Done anything to give Ted cause for this sudden burst of jealousy? No. She had only been glad to have Mr. Frank with her, to hear him talk, to laugh with him. . . .

"It's true, then?" cried Ted, his grip on her arm like a band of steel. "It's true then! He did make love to ye?"

What could Nan answer? Her thoughts were whirling; her heart was flying; this question of Ted's brought such a rush of new thoughts and feelings, left her in such bewilderment betwixt what she knew and what she did not know. She could not lie; could not gain time; could scarce think. Again Ted shook her.

"For the last time," said he; "for the last time, Nan Butler, I ask ye: Did he make love to ye this day?"

For a moment Nan hesitated; then raised her eyes.

"Before God, Ted," said she, "I don't know."

Ted let go her arm, and turning towards the hedge, looked out between the starlit sky and the sleeping fields. She did not know! That was the answer, that the quibble. She did not know! He turned again, and full of the bitterness born of anger and jealousy, spoke out all manner of foolish things.

It was well to know in time; it was well to know the worst. He had been a fool. Oh, he remembered many things now. He had seen Barry looking at Miss Butler, and Miss Butler looking at Barry; he had seen Miss Butler dropping her eyes and blushing. No matter what he had seen. It was all the same. Devil cared. Barry might come to Inishrath night and day for all he cared; he might go for turf in the ould cot from then to kingdom come for all he cared.

"For God's sake, Ted," cried Nan, "what is this you're sayin'?"

Ah, it was nothing. Only a few remarks he was making to himself. It was a fine night, glory be to God. It had been a grand day entirely. He wished to goodness he had been in the bog, hiding behind a clamp and watching Barry at the courting. It must have been powerful comical to see.

Nan stepped forward.

"Ted," said she. "Is it mad ye are?"

"Ah, not at all, Miss Butler," answered he; "not at all. Sure I'm only picturin' things to meself. An' sure ye needn't be distressin' yourself, anyway—an' you able to say before God, that ye don't know anythin'."

"I've told ye the truth, Ted; all of it. Would ye have me lie to ye?"

"Ah, not at all," came back, still in that halting undertone; "not at all. Why, woman dear, it's only a trifle; sure it's only as one ought to expect. Why shouldn't ye give an ignerant booby like me the back o' your hand, an' listen to the palaver of a fine gentleman from London? Why not, indeed!"

It was useless, Nan knew, to say more. In his present mood, Ted was ready to say anything, to do anything; if she went on her knees to him he would only laugh; if she answered him according to his folly there would surely be a scene, a quarrel; if she tried to explain he would return to that miserable question. She walked away a step or two; stopped and turned.

"An' this is all you've got to say to me, Ted?" Nan's voice came pleadingly.

"That'll be all." Ted stood silent a minute with his face to the hedge; suddenly wheeled round.

"Wait," cried he; "wait. There's one thing I'll be sayin' to ye. Don't be thinkin' that I'm done wi' ye; don't be imaginin' I'm goin' to let any man step into me shoes so long as there's a hand on me. Go your ways; but, by God, I'm not done wi' ye yet!" And with the word, Ted strode off towards the lake.

Quite still Nan stood till the clank of Ted's oars came up to her between the hedges; then turned for home, slowly went up the lane, through the back gate, across the yard, lifted the latch and went in. Her mother was sitting by the hearth plying her needle on John's corduroys; close to the chimney jamb, ould John was nodding in his chair over an empty pipe. The glare from the fire and from the

lamp made Nan wince; she turned towards the dresser, took off cap and jacket and hung them on a nail. Ah, but she felt miserable. Ah, but her heart was stony cold.

"Where's Ted?" asked Sarah sharply.

Still with her back to the fire, Nan stooped and pretended to tie her boot lace.

"D' ye hear me, Nan?" Sarah turned quickly. "Where's Ted, I say?"

Nan faced the fire.

"He's gone home, mother. Would there be any supper ready?"

"An' why has he gone home?" asked Sarah, and over her spectacles searched Nan's face.

"He didn't say." Nan pulled a stool to the hearth and sat down.

"What kept ye so late?" asked Sarah, after a pause. "Look at the time o' night."

"There was a lot to do, mother—an' Ted an' I were talkin' awhile."

"I thought he'd have a word for ye," said Sarah, with a nod. "He was expectin' ye before this, I'm thinkin'. Will he be comin' the morrow night?"

"I don't know, mother; he didn't say."

"Ay? An' is Mr. Barry gone home, too? Why, didn't he come in?"

Nan took up the tongs and began mending the fire. Her face had gone hot. She could almost feel the keenness with which her mother was watching her. Ah, if she could but get to bed.

Sarah went on questioning. How had Mr. Barry come to know she was going for turf? Who had asked him to go with her? What did he have to eat

and drink? Did Ted see him? What did Ted say? Glibly, persistently, Sarah questioned, nor failed to keep one eye on Nan and one on her patching; wearily, reluctantly, Nan answered: at last, her patience exhausted, looked at Sarah and begged to be left alone. She was tired, hungry; her head was aching.

"Ask me in the mornin'," pleaded she; "ask me in the mornin'."

"Ah, very well," said Sarah; "very well;" then, with a grim smile playing about her mouth, folded her work, rose, and began preparing supper. No need was there to question further, she thought. She knew enough. Sarah Butler was no fool. She had seen how things were going. Young men didn't come kaleying with ould people; young men didn't sit staring at girls just for sport; didn't sit beyond on Garvagh quay just to let the sun shine on them. Ah, no, thought Sarah, as she lifted the porridge pot from the crook; 'deed they didn't. And now sport was in view. There had been words and threats. There sat Nan as miserable as a sick child. And all because of this Mr. Frank Barry, with his smooth speech and pleasant ways. Yes. She knew these Barrys. She minded the father. There was a look about the son's eyes she had seen before—ah, such a knowing look when a woman happened in sight. Yes; things had happened. There'd be the Piper to pay one of these fine days, thought Sarah; and whoever paid it, might Frank Barry have his share of the sport; for 'twasn't much either of pleasant speech or pleasant ways he'd ever thrown in her direction. No. And now let Nan stop her wool-gathering, and sit over to the supper her ould mother had got for her. "Sit

over," said Sarah, in her sharp way; "an' thank God for all his blessin's to ye."

So Nan sat over; and half way through supper in came John, with a kick at the step and a rush at the door. His face shone red as a coal. His eyes flared. He flung Nan's dinner basket into the corner; threw his cap on the dresser shelf; gulped his supper: then clattered his stool to the hearth and burst forth.

A pretty disgrace this was. Did sons of man ever hear the like? shouted John. A friend of his, a Barry, a man who had sat by his hearth and eaten his bread, to be threatened and disgraced on Inishrath island; to be treated like a dog, like a beggar-man from the mountains! Ah, words failed him. 'Twas scandalous, 'twas infamous! And all for what? All because a friend of his had gone for turf with his daughter Nan. There was for you! That was the kind Mr. Ted Ross had turned out, the ugly, black-guardly, impudent, ungrateful hound! What! Did Nan dare to defend him? Did she dare, after all she had seen that evening? Let Nan listen. If ever she crossed words with that whelp again, she might walk out for evermore across that threshold. Did Nan hear that? shouted John.

"I hear ye," said Nan.

"You've done with him from this day forth," shouted John. "He's a black-mouthed puppy. I passed him on the lake when I was comin' back from Garvagh, and he called me all the names a fishwife ever threw at a tinker. He's a blaggard."

"Och, whisht, John. Whisht," said Sarah. "Sure the poor boy was angry. Sure he'll be sorry for it all in the mornin'."

Ah, let Sarah keep her blarney for calling the ducks. What did Sarah know? Had Sarah seen Ross at his capers that evening? Had Sarah seen him rush at Mr. Frank; had she seen him frothing on the pier below like a mad dog? Ah, let Sarah whisht; let her keep her blarneying for poor Mr. Frank. There was a man for you! He was grit to the backbone. He had defied Ross to his teeth. He was the boy; och, he was the fine ould stock! And to see him all the way over in the cot; sitting there smoking his pipe, and laughing and joking just as if nothing had happened. And to hear him at last as he stood on Garvagh pier bidding John good night.

“‘Well, good night, John,’ says he to me, that cheerful and merry; ‘good night. It’ll be a long time before I come to Inishrath again, I fear.’ ‘How’s that, Mr. Frank?’ answers I. ‘Oh, I’ll be afraid o’ me life,’ says he, an’ laughs. Then I comes to him, an’ takes his hand, an’ grips it hard, an’ says I to him: ‘So long as there’s breath in me body, Mr. Frank, you’re welcome to Inishrath; an’ all I have is yours Mr. Frank; an’ may the devil have the man that insulted ye this night. Come often,’ says I; ‘come often, an’ stay long.’ An’ the last word he says to me is this: ‘I will, John; I will.’

Like that John talked for may be an hour; with Nan giving but half an ear, and Sarah listening hungrily, and old John gazing solemnly across the hearth; at last talked himself weary and stooped to the fire. Nan gave a sigh of relief. Ould John began wagging his head. Sarah rose.

“Well, it’s a curious world,” said she, and took the old man by the arm; “a mighty curious world.

Come away to your bed, father ; come away ; an' be thankful to God ye're near your grave."

"Ay, ay," said ould John, staggering to his feet. "Ay, ay. Good night to ye all ; an' I'm thankful to ye, John, for your powerful discoorse."

"Good night to ye, father," called John. "Sound sleep to ye, me son, an' long life. Aisy, Nan," he went on. "Where are ye goin'?"

"To bed, father. I'm tired."

"Ay ; I accuse ye are," said John ; "it's been a long day for ye. Look here, me girl ; you're not sorry for anythin' I've said the night ? Eh ?"

"I'd be gladder if ye had said less, father."

"Ay ? An' what oughtn't I to have said ?"

Nan moved towards the door.

"Is it what I said about Ross ?" asked John. "Is it that ?"

Nan came to the door, opened it ; for a moment stood with the knob in her hand.

"Ah, poor Ted," said she, and walked on. "Ah, poor, poor Ted !"

Slowly she went up the stairs ; turned along a landing ; came to her room, went in and bolted the door. She had no candle ; that night she needed none. The boards were quite bare ; the walls unpapered, the ceiling low and sloping down from the middle outwards. A box stood in the corner. By the landing wall stood her wooden bedstead, covered with a patchwork quilt. On the walls hung a dress or two, a hat or two, her Sunday jacket ; on the mantelpiece were a few old photographs set in rough frames covered with varnished fir cones.

Facing the door, a small window looked upon the

garden and the trees, and the lake shining in the starlight out beyond the rim of Inishrath. Nan crossed the room, swung the window back, leant her elbows on the frame and her face on her hands, and looked out upon the night.

Ah, how lovely it all was ; not a cloud on the sky, not a breath in the trees : the first night of the new spring. What a day it had been ; what a night it was ; and what an ending to it all ! Ah, she felt miserable, bewildered. It was all so strange. Why had Ted acted so foolishly ? Why had he not waited for a while, waited and asked her quietly about everything ? How had he come to think such things of her, of her and Mr. Frank ? Not a word of warning had he given her, not a hint that such things were in his head. It was jealousy of course. Before long he would be sorry ; would come and ask her father's forgiveness, would come and beg hers.

Suppose Ted did not come ? Suppose it were all over between them ? Ah, why had Ted been so foolish ? Why had he spoilt the end of that lovely day ? Never before had she been happier in this world ; never felt before in her life as she had felt that day. Think of it all ! From first to last she remembered everything, had but to close her eyes to see everything. And Ted had spoilt it all ! She had done no harm, no harm. Why had he been so foolish ? 'Twas jealousy. *Did he make love to ye ?* That was the question.

Had Mr. Frank made love to her ? Was that the meaning of the looks he had given her, the things he had said ? Was Ted right ? Had Mr. Frank made love to her ? Had he ? Why had she let him come

with her? Ah, God forgive her, she was glad he had come! Think of all he had said, the stories he had told, the jokes he had made; think of the look she had seen in his eyes; think of the voice he had, the pleasant face, the pleasant ways, the long white hands, the wavy hair, the gentle manners. . . Ah, if only she could see London; see the shops, the churches, the streets, the ladies riding about, the big river, the place where Mr. Frank sat reading, the place he lived in, those friends of his! If only she could. The day it had been, the long wonderful day.

And Ted had spoilt it all! Oh, she had nearly hated Ted, as he stood there on the pier and in the lane; God help her, she had not forgiven him yet. Ah, she pitied him, she pitied him from her heart. . . but something had come between them; something had come between them. What was it? Ah, she was bewildered. Might God help her to do right, to be brave, to be strong.

"Oh, God help me," cried Nan, and bowed her head upon the window frame; "an' God help us all, an' keep us for Christ's sake. Amen."

So, in Inishrath it was, that first night of the new Spring. And, across the lake, in Ryfield, even as Nan stood sobbing by her window, Frank Barry, with a portrait in his white hand, sat smoking before the parlour fire; and now he glanced at the face of his Marian and swore to be true to it, and now looked into the coals and thought fondly of black-haired Nan, and again, at thought of both, split his mighty heart between them. And upstairs, even whilst Frank sat dreaming, old Hugh lay staring at the

ceiling, and muttering fierce things of fools and weaklings. And outside, even whilst Nan was weeping, Ted Ross paced to and fro over Ryfield lawn, swearing, muttering, pausing often to shake his fist at a lighted window and to pray for a quick meeting with him who sat behind it.

CHAPTER XI.

THE morning broke in glory ; very early shot a sunbeam through Nan's window and woke her. For a while she lay staring at the ceiling and thinking ; then rose, dressed quickly, and flinging wide the window looked out. The splendour of the sun was on the earth, his glory filled the heavens ; the air was sweet and fresh ; the voice of young Spring was abroad. Below, Nan's garden patch lay hungering for the gentle tending of her hands ; beyond the quickening hedges, the fields stretched resplendent in their dew-spangled mantles of green ; away across to the woods, right and left between the hills, the lake ran shimmering and dancing : the birds were singing, the cocks crowing, a great stir of joyous life made voice beneath the sun.

Nan leant her cheeks on her hands. Ah, the lovely morning it was. Just such another day as yesterday it would be. Yesterday ? Mercy, how long ago yesterday seemed, how long ago and how different ! She didn't care to feel the sunshine, to watch the lake, to hear the birds ; yesterday she had cared, but to-day she did not. She was changed ; the world was changed ; life was changed.

Last night ; last night ? Was it all a dream ? There was the pier ; along there Ted and she had

walked: there they had quarrelled. And Ted was gone? And Mr. Frank?

Oh, that time among the heather; the things he had said, the way he had looked! Oh, that time coming home, the talk, the merriment! Then—then, Ted and his foolishness; Ted and his question. Was it foolishness? Was he gone for always? Ah, she pitied him; but he seemed so far away now; and between him and her was someone else.

Presently, Nan went down-stairs; kindled the fire, and hung on the kettle and the porridge pot. She opened the door; swept the kitchen and the hearth with a heather besom; pulled out the table and laid it with shining tins and crockery-ware, with soda bread, and butter, and brown sugar in a blue and white basin. Quickly she worked, mechanically: always she kept thinking of the day before, of the night before, of Ted, and of someone who had come between Ted and her.

Up-stairs, John, her father, yawned noisily; thumped out of bed and began padding heavily over the boards. Soon the roll of his voice sounded between the yawns, and between the shrill snaps of her mother's answers. They were talking about her—Nan knew it—about her and her affairs. Let them talk. She filled a basin with oatmeal, set it on the hearth, pulled out the crook, and stirred the meal as it fell through her fingers, into the boiling pot. *Thud, thud*, came John's feet down the stairs; in he came, made for his stool in the corner and began pulling on his boots. Well, how was Nan feeling this lovely morning; how did she feel after last night's adventures? Faith, like a dream it all seemed to John, like one of those

nightmares that take such liberties with your sleep. But how was Nan feeling this lovely morning? asked John again, and stooped to light his pipe.

"I'm as usual," answered Nan. She set the tea-drawer on a coal. "I'm well enough."

"That's right," said John; "that's a girl. Because your mother an' meself were sayin' above—"

"There's not a turf in the house," said Nan quickly, "but what's on the fire. An' breakfast'll be ready inside ten minutes."

"Ay, ay." John walked to the door. "Ay, ay."

Nan stirred the porridge; brought milk from the dairy and poured it into the mugs; emptied the tea-drawer into the brown teapot, and turned the porridge out upon the plates. Her hands moved quickly, deftly she worked; always she thought of Ted, and of some one who had come between Ted and her.

Sarah came down, hair tousled, face haggard, her eyes bleared; came in, without a word, poured out a cup of tea and drank it greedily. Narrowly she watched Nan over the cup-rim; shrewdly observed her paleness, her look of cheerless reserve.

"Where's your father?" said she, setting down her cup.

"Gone for a creel of turf, mother."

"Dang the turf," answered Sarah. "I wish they were in the bog this minute."

In a while, John came back and sat down to breakfast. He seemed his old self again. Once or twice, between spoonfuls, he remarked on the grandeur of the morning; after his second cup of tea, he slapped his knee and broke into a guffaw; but neither Nan nor Sarah gave him a word. Sarah was watching

Nan; Nan was thinking of the day before, of Ted, and of someone who had come between Ted and her.

Breakfast over, John began carrying the turf from the cot. Sarah dressed and fed ould John. Nan finished the housework and, towards noon, fell to digging in her garden-patch.

The sun was hot, the air held a fine freshness, from the earth came up a sweet breath of newness and health; there were songs in all the hedges, life and gladness everywhere. Up the lane John came groaning under his load, down he went whistling; after a while failed to come and Nan knew that he was asleep somewhere in the sun. Ould John hobbled out, in his beaver hat and long frieze coat; stumbled to the window sill and sat blinking at the flashes of Nan's spade. "Och, och," he would say; "och, ay." Also came Sarah and watched Nan from the door-step. She had tidied herself, and looked less shrewish; but there were knowing depths in her eyes.

Nan plied her spade vigorously, if not with her customary zest. She loved work, particularly work in this garden that she loved. The earth was so kindly, so ready to repay abundantly all toil given in its behalf. It was pleasant to see the clods break and crumble, to see the sunshine lick each spadeful, to see order drive out disorder and Spring dispossess old Winter; and was it not glorious, even with the mind's eye, to see the hollyhocks here and the dahlias there, that plot blazing with nasturtiums and this full of velvet-faced pansies, to see, across the back of a month or two, sweet Summer in her prime and mellow Autumn in her fatness?

Yes, it was glorious ; but what might happen before ever a flower bloomed, ay, even before a root struck ? Think of what a day had brought forth. Where was Ted ? Nan wondered. What was he thinking ? Would he defy her father and come ? He had vowed to keep her : would he keep his vow ?

Where was Mr. Frank ? Nan wondered, and glanced over her shoulder towards Garvagh pier. When would he come ? What would he do ? Would he stay away for fear of Ted ; or would he come as he had promised her father ? She wanted to see Ted, to reason with him ; she hoped Ted would come soon : but, ah, God help her, she hoped, even against herself, that Mr. Frank might come sooner. She pitied Ted ; but he seemed far away, and between him and her was—was Frank.

The morning passed ; the afternoon went swiftly ; evening came, with its chill winds from the lake, its sweet peace, its trail of stars. By the Butlers' fire-side, John smoked and trimmed basket rods ; Sarah knitted and pondered ; old John mumbled and slept, woke and mumbled ; far from the hearth, yet within range of Sarah's eye, Nan sat plying her needle, sat thinking and stitching and listening for the sound of a foot on the step. Whose foot would sound first—Ted's or Frank's ? Suppose Ted came ? . . . Suppose Frank came ? . . .

But neither put his foot on the step that evening ; not a cry came from Garvagh pier, not a rattle from Ted's oars ; with Nan it was only stitch and listen, think and listen, all the evening long.

So that night went, and the next, and the next ; and Nan, on the fourth night of that new Spring, as

she stood once more looking from her window, had but small warmth of hope at her heart. She felt old and worn. Life seemed to Nan but a weary thing, dark and very cruel. The Spring had lost its charm; the days their glory; the nights their glamour. What of the days and nights, she said, when her heart was sore! She was lonely. Her mother was hard and bitter, her father strange; she could hardly speak to them. She was so lonely. Surely, in four days, Frank might—

Hush! Had someone moved in the hedge there beyond the garden? Surely someone had? Nan leant far out; peered hard; waited almost breathlessly. Was it Frank? Was it Ted?

“Who is it?” she called softly; and again, a little louder: “Who is it?”

A twig broke in the hedge; in the half light something seemed to move.

“Who is it?” called Nan. “Who is it?”

Surely someone was crouching there behind the quicks. Was it Ted? Was it Frank?

“Is that you—Mr. Frank?” called Nan. “Is it you?”

No answer came and not a sound. Nan closed her window. It was nothing, thought she; nothing but a fancy. Ah, yes, everything was fancy now; life now was all wishing and all fancying. She knelt and asked God to bless everyone; to bless her father and mother and all her friends, to bless Ted and keep him, to bless Frank and keep him: yes, Nan asked God to bless Frank Barry, who just then sat smoking in Ryfield parlour and pondering the portrait of his Marian; and to bless Ted Ross, who just then was

rising from his place behind a hedge, and muttering as he rose: "She said, *Is that you, Frank? Is that you?* My God!"

In the fifth day of that new Spring, late in the afternoon, a cry came to Nan, stooping in her garden patch, from Garvagh pier. It was not Frank's cry; still, he might, by chance, be near the shore, she might, by chance, have sight of his face. Yes, yes! Hurriedly she ran down the lane, pushed out the cot and started for Garvagh. *He might come*, her heart sang in time with the oars; *he might come*. *Who knows?* Vigorously, with something of her old gladness of heart, she swung to and fro on the thwart. *He might*. *He might*, she murmured. The cot neared the shore. She dared not look. *He might*. *He might*, she said.

The cot swung round. She lifted her eyes and there stood old Hugh Barry. The gladness died in Nan's heart. Old Hugh, thought she; not Frank, but his grim old uncle.

The cot ran up on the landing-place; without a word, Hugh stepped in and stiffly sat down. His face looked mighty hard, Nan thought, mighty hard and cold. She rowed a stroke or two; then, with an effort:

"It'll be fine weather, Mr. Barry?" said she, looking at her hands.

"It is, thank God," answered Hugh. "It's the best o' weather."

"Ye'll be for the Lismahee side, Mr. Barry?"

"For Inishrath, I'll thank ye." Hugh pointed at the island with his staff. "Inishrath, I'll thank ye."

Nan looked swiftly at him. For Inishrath? And

why? It was years since he last put his foot there; he disliked her father: oh, she hoped nothing was wrong. Could it be that he was coming about Frank?

"D'ye hear me?" said Hugh, sharply. "I said Inishrath; an' you're makin' for the quay beyond. Pull that left oar."

Silently, but with flaming cheeks, Nan altered her course and steadily rowed on. Hugh sat peering here and there under his bushy eyebrows and tapping with his staff on the gunwale; after a while turned his eyes and looked long and steadfastly at Nan.

Ay, faith, thought he; ay, faith. So this was the jade who was making a fool of Frank. Just so. She had grown a trifle these last few years; she seemed a strong, well-boned wench; he supposed she had her share of good looks? Yes, she had. She was the kind of damsel Frank's father used to look twice at. She had good eyes in her. She had a good face. He liked the way her hair—Phat! One would think he was Frank! Fiercely, Hugh smote the gunwale with his staff and looked away.

Nan rowed on; presently, old Hugh looked at her again. To think that John Butler could rear a daughter like that—a fine bouncing girl like that! And a sensible girl, too, that knew her place and could keep her tongue quiet. Why, last time he saw her, she was only a ragged-tailed schoolgirl with her hair in wisps. But had she any brains, any wits? That was the point. It was none of his business; still, he was curious to know what Frank saw in the wench, mighty curious.

So Hugh, sitting upright in the end of the cot, and with his hands crossed atop his staff, began ply-

ing Nan with questions; sometimes looking full at her, sometimes only sideways, always jerking out his words with that domineering manner of his, that manner which seldom failed him be his victim man or woman, Frank or Nan. He asked about the ferry, about her work, pleasures, her time of rising and going to bed, her way of spending Sunday, her views of this and that—buttermaking, calf-rearing and the rest: and to all Nan replied briefly, sensibly, replied with pleasure even, for was not this Frank's uncle, and, besides that, for all his uncouthness, was there not something in the old man she liked well? He was a fine, hardy old fellow, and his eyes were honest, and his voice; she liked to answer his questions even though some of them made her blush and bite her lip. But why was he questioning her? Nan asked herself after a while, just indeed as she dropped an oar to turn for Inishrath pier. She looked at him, the question kindling on her face; and there old Hugh sat peering at her across his hands, peering steadily with something like admiration shining in his eyes.

“Just so,” said he; “oh, just so. Well, it could be worse. Ay, it could.”

“What could, Mr. Barry?”

Hugh waved a hand; slowly rose.

“Nothin’,” answered he. “It’s only a way ould people have o’ talkin’ nonsense to themselves. Just that; just that.”

With his head back, and his eyes, now this side now that, flashing scorn on the nakedness of John’s domain, old Hugh, with Nan at his elbow, tramped up the lane, passed through the green gate, stamped

along the narrow walk, and coming to the Butlers' front door smote it twice with the end of his staff.

"Is that your work?" said he, turning and pointing at Nan's garden.

"It is, Mr. Barry."

"Hm," grunted Hugh. "Your father didn't help ye, I warrant?"

"Ah, no, sir; ah, no. Sure father doesn't bother about trifles like that."

"Hm," grunted Hugh again; then, the door opening, turned to Sarah Butler as she stood with one hand on the latch and the other fumbling in her dirty apron. "Good evenin' to ye, Mrs. Butler," said Hugh. He stepped into the hall. "I hope I see ye well, ma'am?"

Aw, now; Sarah was finely, thank God. And how was Mr. Barry himself? But wouldn't Mr. Barry be stepping into the wee room, now?

"The kitchen'll do for me, ma'am, I thank ye," said Hugh; then turned through the passage door and came upon John sitting in his shirt sleeves over his tea, and ould John fast asleep beside the fire.

"Good evenin', John Butler. Now don't stir, I ask ye. Just finish your meal, an' never mind me. I'm obliged to ye, ma'am," said Hugh, as Sarah wiped a chair and set it for him by the hearth. "No, no, John," he said again, and refused the offer of a cup of tea. "No, no; I'll just wait till you're done an' then have a word with ye. Yes."

With his hands crossed on the knob of his staff, his hat on his knee, and his eyes on the fire, Hugh sat stolidly and silently waiting. Now and again, John turned and, his saucer poised, made a remark

about the fine weather and the early spring ; and Hugh only grunted in response. Beyond the table, Sarah, her face flushed and curiosity flaming in her eyes, looked hard and not lovingly at Hugh, and now questioningly at Nan, and now meaningly at John. Nan, seated at the end of the table, ate soberly and but seldom raised her eyes. What the sorrow, now ? thought John, with a glance at Sarah. What in glory, now ? thought Sarah, with a look at Hugh and a glance at Nan. Is it about Frank ? thought Nan. A cloud, so to speak, heavy with restraint, with foreboding and excitement, hung over the table ; a cloud whose skirts went trailing for Hugh's white head.

Presently, John set down his empty cup ; wiped his mouth on his sleeve and turned his chair.

"Now, Mr. Barry," said he, pulling out his pipe ; "now I'll do till supper time. Faith, an' bad manners to me keepin' ye there this long. But you'll know," said John, with a hollow laugh ; "sacks an' stomachs were made to be filled. Ay, indeed."

Hugh rose.

"I want a word with ye, Butler."

"Why, of course," said John ; "of course, Mr. Barry. Set the chairs in the wee room, Nan, an' get out the glasses."

"Ye needn't bother." Hugh made for the door. "Outside'll do well enough. Good day to ye, ma'am," he said to Sarah. "An' to you, me girl," he said to Nan ; "an' good luck be with ye."

"Aw, good evenin' to ye, Mr. Barry," answered Sarah. "An' thank ye kindly for your visit. An'," cried Sarah as the door closed, "may your mannerless carcass niver sit in this house again. Phew, it's

fair chokin' I am. What in glory's up? What did he say to ye, Nan, comin' across? Come, none o' your humours, miss; but. . . ."

Hugh and John crossed the yard towards the fields. John's face was solemn; one hand gripped his pipe stem, the other swung limply to and fro. Hugh, looking here and there and thumping his staff upon the stones, strode grimly on; at the lane he turned.

"It's a wonder ye couldn't find time, John Butler, to put a nail in that," he said, pointing at the broken gate. "It's a wonder ye couldn't take a shovel in your hand and clear some o' the muck off that yard. Eh?"

"Ay." John cocked his head. "Well, mebbe it is a wonder."

"If ye had as much top-dressin' on this field," Hugh went on, wheeling about, "as ye have in sight o' your door step it'd be better for you an' it. Man, what kind are ye? Ha' ye no bowels in ye? To let good land get into such a state! Look at it; as poor as the side of a mountain. Ha' ye no shame?"

"I'm choke-full o' shame," answered John. "I give ye me word, Mr. Barry, but I'm 'shamed to dirty me boots on it."

"It'd disgrace a Connaught man," cried Hugh. "Look at the bare ribs of it; an' the physicked look it has; an' as much grass on it as there's wool on a skinned sheep. Grass? A goat would sniff at it."

"If so be there was a decent hedge handy," said John; "dang me, but the goat'd be right."

"You're scoffin', sir," said Hugh, turning up hill;

"you're scoffin', sir. Look at it! A wilderness; a wilderness. Why don't ye stir yourself, sir?" shouted Hugh, swinging round. "Why don't ye dig, an' manure, an' plough; why don't ye get into the plough yourself an' drag it?"

"Ay," answered John, "I misdoubt the sight o' meself in a plough'd make the asses wag their tails."

"There's not a man in the country," Hugh kept on, "that has half your chances or makes a sorrier use of them. Bah! I have no patience with ye; no patience at all."

"Ah, no," said John. A smile broadened on his face; meekly he trudged along. He was used to talk like that; it never broke a bone in him; if Hugh had no worse than that to say he might keep on till kingdom come.

Again Hugh turned.

"There's your daughter is worth two dozen of ye," said he, pointing down hill with his staff. He walked on a step, "It's a wonder ye wouldn't let someone better than you take care of her?"

"Ay, it is, Mr. Barry. Sure it is a wonder."

Hugh took another step; stopped again.

"It's time ye were marryin' her," he said.

John looked across the fields.

"Ay," said he; "mebbe it is. But it's a free country, Mr. Barry, an' it's not for me to tell the girl what she's to do. If she marries a decent man, then God bless her; if she sees us to the churchyard, God bless her for that: for she's a good girl."

Hugh looked hard at John; grunted and turned. This Butler was a slippery fellow. Again said he:

"Mr. Frank, my nephew, is occasionally in Inishrath, I believe?"

"An odd time."

"What does he come for?"

"He niver said, Mr. Barry; an' I niver asked him."

"What does he do here?"

"Aw, he talks, and smokes an' laughs, an'—Aw, just makes himself at home."

"I know." Hugh paused for a breath. "Well, I want this to stop, Butler; I want you to stop it. I want ye to tell Mr. Frank that he must quit making these visits; in fact I want ye to forbid him your house."

John looked steadily at Hugh.

"Forbid Mr. Frank the house?"

"Yes; I wish it."

"An' why, Mr. Barry, may I ask?"

Hugh waved his hand.

"There are many reasons. He's wanted at Ryfield. I see too little of him. He didn't come to Ireland to go scooting all over the country. He has work to do. Chut! Never mind reasons. I simply wish what I say."

"Ay," said John, "Ay? Well, I'll give him your wishes, Mr. Barry, first time I see him."

"You'll do what I say, Butler; you'll forbid him your house."

John looked at the grass; fell to rubbing his chin with finger and thumb.

"No;" said he; "no. I can't do that."

"Can't? You must."

"So long as Mr. Frank chooses to look at my fire,"

John went on, "he's welcim. You can tell him what ye like, Mr. Barry; but I'll not say it. I never shut me dure in the face of a Barry yet; an', please God, I never will."

"If ye don't," shouted Hugh. "If ye don't—What! Ye take his part against me?"

"I take no part or parts, Mr. Barry. I just know this: Last time I seen Mr. Frank I gave him word that so long as there was a coal on the hearth he'd be welcim to warm himself at it. An' to that I stand. Yes. I'm sorry—"

"Sorry!" shouted Hugh. "Keep your sorrow. Here, let me out of this. It's what I might have expected. But let me tell ye, John Butler," cried Hugh, turning on the hillside; "if by any chance what you're wishin' an' he's playin' the fool for should come to pass—Whoo! Let me out of this," cried Hugh; then started towards the lake. But John caught him by the arm.

"Finish your speech, Mr. Barry," said he. "I'm bad at riddles."

For a moment, Hugh hung on his heel, peering the while over his shoulder into John's eyes; then snorted and strode off.

"Ay," said he, with a laugh; "I can see ye are. All the wits belongin' to ye has run to the petticoats."

"I know," answered John. "For all that I'd thank ye to finish your speech."

"I'd thank ye to ferry me to Garvagh," Hugh answered; "an' to say no more."

So John ferried Hugh to Garvagh; and all the way over no word was spoken. Hugh sat with drawn brows, glowering right and left; John with puzzled

eyes that occasionally sought Hugh's face. The cot swung round; took the pier; up rose Hugh.

"I'm obliged to ye," said he.

"Aw, don't mention it, Mr. Barry," answered John. "Sure the obligation's with me. Good day to ye, sir; an' good luck."

Hugh did not answer. Noisily he tramped up the pier; came to the edge of the oak plantation and there met Frank his nephew. He drew one side as if to pass; suddenly stepped in front of Frank and looked him in the eyes.

"Is it for Inishrath ye are this fine evenin'?" said he.

"Well—perhaps, uncle—perhaps."

"Then hurry yourself," said Hugh, and pointing towards the lake stepped aside. "Don't let me keep ye from makin' a fool o' yourself. Hurry yourself, I say, or the cot'll be gone."

And before Frank could fashion an answer, his uncle had passed into the dusk of the plantation.

CHAPTER XII.

WITH her sleeves rolled above her elbows and her skirt bunched below her apron, Nan was kneading dough on the table by the kitchen window. Her mother was up-stairs; ould John sat basking before the fire and blinking at the pan that hung from the crook: it was falling dusk and in the bad light Nan worked more by touch than sight. The fifth day, she kept thinking, the fifth night; and again, as she gathered the dough into a ball, dusted it with flour, and kneaded it out, the fifth day it is, thought she, the fifth night. She flattened the dough, rounded it, slipped her palms beneath it, carried it across and laid it on the pan; then made up the fire and turned again to the table.

Why had old Hugh come? she asked herself. Whisht! Voices outside in the garden? Whisht! That was her father's laugh. Whisht! That was Mr. Frank's. Ah, dear heaven, how her heart was thumping. How could she face him? Now, they were at the door; now they were in the hall. Ah, dear heaven. Quickly Nan faced towards the window; bent her head, and with a knife began scraping together the broken dough.

"Ha, ha," said John, bustling into the kitchen and filling it in a moment with noise and life. "Here we are again, childer. Walk in Frank, me son, walk

in, an', Hugh or no Hugh, make yourself at home. Here, Nan; look who I've brought ye in place of ould Hugh. Ho, ho," laughed John. "Look, Nan, ye girl ye."

With her teeth tight in her lip, and her nostrils quivering, Nan turned slowly; saw Frank and dropped her eyes. She was pale as death. She gripped the edge of the table and held it fast. Not a word could she fashion; not a thought had she.

"Good evening, Nan." Frank stepped towards her with his hand out. "How are you?"

Still Nan clutched the table; still kept her eyes down.

"Surely *you're* not going to forbid me the house, Nan?" said Frank, in his airy way. "Come; you'll shake hands with an old friend?"

"Come, Nan," shouted John. "Why, dang it all, girl, what's up wi' ye?"

Nan gave her hand; Frank took it, then, without a word, walked to the window.

"Ah," said he; "I thought something was wrong. Look, Nan." He showed his hand all white with flour; "you've left your mark upon me now with a vengeance."

"Aw," said Nan, and at the word the blood came surging mercifully to her cheeks; "aw, now!" She ventured a look at Frank. John guffawed and smote his leg. A smile crept along Nan's face. "Aw, now," said she; "the fool I was."

"Well, make amends, then," said Frank, still standing with his hand spread before her.

"How?" Nan blushed, looked up.

"You might wipe it for me," said Frank; and in

a burst of laughter all the load of dread and hopelessness gathered through those four days of spring went tumbling from Nan's heart. Come at last !

John and Frank sat down by the fire and began to talk. Nan lighted the lamp, and went up-stairs ; presently came back, in Sunday frock and clean apron, and her mother with her.

"Ho, ho," cried John, turning on his stool ; "so here ye both are. See who I've brought ye, Sarah, instead of ould Hugh. An' was Nan tellin' ye about the handshake she gave him? Haw, haw."

Sarah nodded.

"Good evenin', Mr. Barry."

Frank bobbed his head.

"Good evening to you, Mrs. Butler."

Nan sat down between Frank and John. Her face was radiant. Sarah took a stool between Frank and ould John. Her eyes were shining ; her face set and hard. John lit his pipe, rubbed his hands together ; for the benefit of Nan and Sarah, began telling of his interview with ould Hugh. His voice rolled round the room ; his hands darted here and there : hardly a word of his own or of Hugh's did he leave unsaid. A smile on his face, and his legs stretched over the hearthstone, Frank sat smoking, thinking, observing. Nan listened in wonderment, almost in dismay. Sarah, bolt upright on her stool, sat taking in John's words as though they were the very breath of life.

"So that's what he came for?" said Sarah at last, looking first at John and then at Frank. "That's what he came for !"

"There's the whole story," said John ; "word for

word as I tell it to ye. An' best of all, childer ;" John slapped his knee ; "as Hugh steps out of the cot down steps me darlin' Frank there, jist as if the angels had sent him, an' takes Hugh's place! Haw, haw. Did iver ye hear the like? Haw, haw!"

Frank laughed. Nan sat silent. Sarah looked into the fire.

"So that's what he came for?" said she again. "That was it!"

"An' did mortal man iver come on a foolisher journey?" asked John. "Sure it's dotin' he must be. . . . But I wonder, now, what he'd be meanin' be that last speech of his? 'If be any chance,' says Hugh, 'what you're wishin' an' he's playin' the fool for should come to pass—;' an' there he stopped, an' do what I would, not a word more he'd say. Now, I wonder," said John, cocking his wise head at the fire, "what he'd be meanin'? I dunno. Would you be smarter, Mr. Frank?"

"Oh, no, John," answered Frank, with a laugh. "I'm just as dull as you are. Could you answer, Nan?"

Nan shook her head; said nothing.

"He meant somethin'," John went on. "He spoke powerful fierce, so he did. What's your opinion, Sarah?"

For a moment, Sarah sat rubbing her hands along her knees; then, fixed her eyes on the fire and sniffed disdainfully.

"Ah, my opinion'd be worth little," said she, "on anything a cliver man like Mr. Hugh Barry'd be sayin'. But if you'd like to know what's troublin' the wits of an ould fool like Sarah Butler, sure I'd

answer ye same as the woman answered when someone axed her age."

"And what did she say, Mrs. Butler?" asked Frank.

"Jist this, Mr. Barry: I guess more'n I know, an' I know more'n I'll say."

"'Twas a clever answer," said Frank.

"'Twas so." Sarah sniffed again. "'Twas so, Mr. Barry."

"Ay," said John. "Sure ould Hugh was right when he allowed that most o' the wits o' the world go to the petticoats—Whisht! Aw, dear heavens, if there isn't someone whistlin' at the ferry. But it's always the same; jist as ye get comfortable in bed somethin' bites ye." And laughing noisily, John went out.

Silence fell upon the kitchen. Sarah got down her knitting. Nan turned the cake on the pan and re-made the fire. In a while, said Frank:

"Suppose we keep your father company, Nan? You wouldn't mind, Mrs. Butler?"

"Aw, it's please *yourself*, Mr. Barry, you'll do," answered Sarah; "I'm of no account."

"Come along, then; we'll catch him if we're quick." Frank jumped up, went out through the hall door; and without a word Nan took her cap and followed him.

Slowly Frank went down the walk, sniffing at the breeze and gazing at the stars.

"What a night," said he. "What a freshness! What a glittering roof of the world!"

"Ah, yes indeed," murmured Nan, smiling in her tremulous happiness. "Yes, indeed."

Slowly Frank went down the lane ; lingeringly looked here and there across the hedges.

"What a spring-time this is," cried he. "What wonders these last five days have wrought !"

"Ah, yes," murmured Nan, sighing gently through her words. "Ah, yes indeed."

Slowly, very slowly, Frank passed through the trees ; and now halted to admire the shimmering lake, and now stopped to star-gaze between the branches.

"What beauty !" cried he. "What peace !"

"Ah, yes," murmured Nan in her joyousness. "It's wonderful."

Slowly Frank paced the pier ; at the end thereof paused to look across the broad waters. "*Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep,*" quoted he ; suddenly looked up. "Why, Nan, my girl, we're late after all. Hark ! Why, he's almost at Garvagh. Never mind ; let's sit here for a while." And side by side they sat them down on the side of the pier.

"Well, how have you been getting on, Nan ?" asked Frank, pushing back his hat and setting his legs swinging.

"Ah, much as usual." Nan fell to picking pebbles off the pier and dropping them on the shore. "Much the same," said she.

"Did you think I was never coming again ?"

"Ah, I—I was wonderin'."

"Did you want to see me again, Nan ?"

"Ah, I—I did. Sure we all did."

"You didn't think I was frightened of—well, you know whom ?"

"Ah, no."

"Suppose he came upon us now, Nan, as we sit here? Why, there'd be murder under the stars; surely there would."

"Ah!" Nan shivered.

Frank leant back on an elbow.

"Tell me, Nan. Have you seen Mr. Ted Ross since a few nights ago?"

"No, Mr. Frank; not a sight."

"Indeed? Well I have—once, twice, thrice. He shadows me, threatens me. He vows he will have my blood; he is a perpetual nuisance."

"Aw," cried Nan.

"He came to the door," Frank went on, "the same night in which he attacked me here on the quay and invited me to step out and fight him on the lawn. Of course that was out of the question; nor could I oblige him the following morning; nor was I in the humour to soil my hands on his jacket a day or two after when I met him in the fields; nor, indeed, have I felt disposed to accept a couple of illspelt challenges he has forwarded me by letter. Still, he is a nuisance, I must say."

"Aw," said Nan again.

"It's hard to know how to deal with such a fellow. Excuse me, Nan, for calling him that, but I can't help it. He is so persistent, absurdly wrong-headed. I tried to reason with him. I asked him to explain himself. I said if I had injured him in any way, or offended him, I was ready to apologise and make amends. No use at all. He *will* have his one idea, will be obdurate. What do you think, Nan, is the absurd idea that's at the root of all these goings on? Just guess."

"Ah, no." Nan shook her head. "Ah, I—I couldn't."

"He says I am making love to you ; says I made love to you all that day we were together in the turf bog ; says—nay, will have it, whether I like it or no, that I have forced his place in your affections. Now what do you think of that, Nan Butler ?"

Nan did not answer. How should she, and her heart in her throat ?

"You don't answer me, Nan ?" Frank went on, sitting upright again and turning towards her. "Am I to take it, then, that Mr. Ted Ross, in your opinion, is right ?"

"No, no," answered Nan. "Never did I say such a thing."

"Is he right in any way ?" Frank persisted, still peering round at her face. "Did I make love to you, for instance, in any form, that day we spent among the heather ?"

"No," answered Nan, with a shake of her head. "No, Mr. Frank."

"Did I say a word to you that Mr. Ross himself could object to ? Did I, Nan ?"

"No," answered Nan again, plucking quickly at her apron. "No, Mr. Frank."

"We simply had a happy day together—a happy, innocent day. You enjoyed talking to me, hearing me talk ; I enjoyed talking to you, laughing with you, watching you at your work ; we ate and drank together, were merry and happy. That was it, Nan ? That was how we spent our day ?"

"It was," said Nan. "That was it."

"And for that I am threatened, insulted ; and for

that you are—" Frank paused. "But what did he say to you, Nan, that night? Did you quarrel?"

"We did."

"He said to you, Nan, much the same that he said to me? Was very angry; spoke foolishly; went away in wrath? Is that how it was?"

"Somethin' like that."

"So our happy day brought forth just this: unhappiness to you, foolishness to your sweetheart, annoyance to me? Isn't that so?"

Nan did not answer. "Is this, oh, is this what he's come for?" thought she.

"Isn't that so?" repeated Frank.

"Somethin' like that."

Frank lay back on his elbow.

"Well, Nan," said he, "I think my uncle made only one mistake when he came asking your father to forbid me the house. He did not come soon enough. And your father made only one mistake when he welcomed me to Inishrath: simply, in welcoming me at all. Look what I've done. Separated lovers; set my uncle against your father; made Ted take to folly; made you unhappy." He turned quickly.

"You are unhappy, Nan; aren't you?"

"Ah, 'deed I am," cried Nan; and as she cried a twig broke somewhere among the trees. "'Deed I am very unhappy."

Frank groaned.

"And all through me!" He shot to his feet. "But, Nan, this must stop. I won't have you unhappy. I won't be the means of darkening these glorious spring days for you. It's my fault and I'll

bear the cost ; I've been a fool and I'll pay the penalty. I'll do anything to set things straight. I'll go to your sweetheart and force him to have sense—I'll make him—I'll fight him," cried Frank, and as he cried something moved among the trees, "if nothing else will satisfy him. I'll do anything. John must forgive him. You, Nan, must forgive him. . . . What! Crying, Nan ; crying, my girl?" Frank knelt on the stones and took her by the wrists. "Crying, Nan? Ah, Nan, my girl, don't, don't. You'll break my heart. Don't, Nan! I can't bear it." He let go her wrists, rose, stood looking across the lake for awhile ; then, turned and seated himself once more by Nan's side on the edge of the pier. He must be strong, he said to himself ; whatever happened he must be strong.

"Listen to me, Nan. Let me confess myself. I've been a fool ; a poor weak fool. I've allowed myself to slide ; have been as limp as straw. I've been untrue to myself ; I've been untrue to—to others. . . . Nan, Ted is not quite right ; but he's not very wrong. I haven't made love to you. No ; I have not ; but, ah, how I've wanted to ! The first time I saw your face my heart warmed to you ; the second time I saw you it beat faster for you ; that day among the heather it longed for you. God knows it did," cried Frank Barry.

Nan's tears had dried. Her eyes were shining again ; her breath galloping. *God knows it did!*

"Yours is the sweetest face, Nan, I've ever seen. To yourself I say it even now. And in all the world I don't believe there's a better woman, or a sweeter, than you, Nan Butler. I envy those who live under

the roof with you; I envy the man to whom you've given your heart—I wish to Heaven it were mine. I wish to God I were free to tell you my love.”

Nan's cheeks were blazing; in her eyes the love-light shone and glowed. *I wish to Heaven it were mine!*

“But I'm cruel and weak. I'm saying what is foolish and vain. Ah me, the irony of life! If only—if only—But what nonsense is this. Nan, forgive me. Don't heed what I've said; don't remember a word. It's all folly; utter folly. I've fought against it—night and day I've fought it and myself. I've tried hard to keep from seeing you. I've tried not to think of you. I've tried to do my duty by you, and myself, and—and others. And always I've been weak. . . . Nan, I came to-night to tell you, what I should have said long ago: that we must see each other no more. We must not; shall not. . . . Ah, Nan, Nan. Ah, but it's hard!”

Frank Barry covered his face with his hands and moaned down at the stones. Nan sat looking along the shore. Her face, now, was set and pale; her hands lay clasped on her lap. *We must not, shall not!*

“Ah, but it's hard,” moaned Frank Barry; then raised his face once more. “It's hard; but I'll get over it. In a week or so I'll be back in London, back at my work and my moiling; in a week or so—Yes, I'll get over it. We all do; we all do. Nan,” said he, turning, “will you ever think of me when I'm far away in grimy old London; ever recall anything I've said to you? Will you, Nan?”

Nan turned slowly and looked at him.

"Think of ye?" said she. "Think of what ye've said? Ye ask me that! Tell me this, Mr. Barry: Did ye mean what ye said to me, ten minutes ago?"

"Mean it, Nan? I meant every word of it."

"An' ye think a woman can hear such things an' forget them, forget them for ever and ever?"

"Ah, I know; I know. Nan. It was foolish of me; mad, cruel. But I couldn't help it. You made me, Nan; you made me. It was your voice, the sight of you, yourself. But you'll forgive me? You'll forget. . . ."

Nan rose quickly.

"Ah, quit," cried she, passionately. "Quit, for God's sake!"

Frank sat looking up at her. A while of silence came. The beat of John's oars sounded nearer and nearer.

"I have hurt you, Nan?" asked Frank, at last. He sprang to his feet. "What can I do?" cried he, spreading his arms. "Tell me: what am I to do?"

Nan stepped upon the pier. Frank clutched at her arm.

"Tell me, Nan," cried he. "What can I say or do?"

Nan paused, looking down at him.

"Ye need say nothin'," she answered. "An' ye may do nothin'."

"And you forgive me?"

"Ah, forgive," cried Nan. "Forgive!"

She started down the pier. Hastily Frank followed her, his hand out as if to grip her shoulder.

"Nan," he called softly. "Nan!"

But Nan walked on; presently raised her voice.

"Hello, father," called she. "Is that you, father?"

"Ay, ay," came back. "Is that Nan? Is anything wrong?"

"Ah, no. It's only Mr. Barry an' meself come down to meet ye. Hurry in. Supper's ready."

"An' a good job, too," said John, as the cot swung in by the pier; "for it's meself that wants it. So you've both come down to meet the ould man? That's right. God bless ye both, me childer; God bless ye. An' now come away, Frank, for a chat an' a smoke, an' a drop o' the crature, ye dog ye! Come away, now, yourself an' Nan."

So, Nan this side, Frank that, and John holding forth in the middle, the three left the pier; went up the lane, across the yard and into the kitchen: and there, in front of the fire, sat ould John, Sarah, and Ted Ross.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT sight of Ted sitting there on the hearthstone, Nan drew a swift breath and clutched at the side of the dresser; Frank buttoned his jacket and leant against the wall; John walked a step or two across the floor, stopped and stood staring at Ted's back. Sarah turned and looked at the three; wiped her lips with her hand and again faced the fire. "Ay, ay," croaked ould John. "Och, ay, ay." Ted himself, elbows on knees and his hands clasped, sat crouched upon his stool: not a word said he, not a hair's width did he move, the while John and the rest stood eyeing him. Whilst you might count twenty, dead silence held the room; then a coal fell, Sarah coughed, and John took a stride forward.

"Well, I'm for iver danged!" said he; and stopped again. Nan moved from the dresser. Frank Barry crossed his legs and leant an elbow against the door. Sarah, at sound of John's voice, looked round. "Hish," said she. Still Ted Ross sat dumb and motionless.

"Well, I'm for iver danged," cried John again, "if this isn't the biggest piece of impidence—Here," he shouted, and made across the floor; "let me get at the scruff o' your neck." And with the word Ted shot to his feet and turned his back to the fire.

"Good-evenin', Mr. Butler," said he.

With an oath John made for him. Nimble Ted sprang one side and let John go sprawling across a stool, heels in the air, his hands on the hearthstone. Sarah clutched John's coat. "Let the boy alone," she cried. "Hear what he's got to say." Nan ran across the floor. "Father," she pleaded. "Ah, father!" John scrambled to his feet.

"Let me go, Sarah," he spluttered. "Let me at the pup." He broke from Sarah's grip. "Out o' the way, Nan; out o' the way, girl!"

Nan put her hands against John's breast.

"No, father," said she; "no. Stand back."

"I'll break his neck," shouted John. "I'll pulp ivery bone in him."

"You'll do what I tell ye," said Nan. Steadily she pushed John back. "No; further—further. That'll do. An' now," said she, turning towards Ted; "now maybe you'll be sayin' something."

"He'll say nothin'," shouted John, from the middle of the floor; "he'll say nothin' in this house. I won't hear him. He's a reprobate. I'll not be quiet. He insulted me; he insulted me friends—"

"Ach, let the boy speak," Sarah broke in. "It's his due. He's been wronged. Let him speak, John, I tell ye."

"No," roared John; and with that Frank Barry took a step from the wall.

"If my word has any weight with you, John," said he; "I advise you to do what Mrs. Butler says. And if I'm in the way at all," added Frank with a wave of his hand; "please say the word and out I go."

"Eh? You, too, Frank!" John looked round in amaze. "Let your tongue be short and quick

then," he shouted at Ted; "an' mind your manners, I advise ye. An' stay where ye are, Frank Barry; stay where ye are, me son."

Ted had been standing with his back to the wall, eyes fixed on Nan's face, his arms folded across his breast; now, he dropped his hands, stood erect, stepped from the wall.

"I'm obliged to ye, Mr. Butler," said he; "an' I'm obliged to the rest o' ye for what—"

"Take off your cap, sir," called John; "an' less o' your obligations."

"I'm thankful to ye again, Mr. Butler," answered Ted, pulling off his cap; "an' for the sight o' your good example."

"Niver heed me." John pulled off his hat and flung it in the corner. "Jist less o' your impudence, mister, an' more o' your news. Come sir."

Nan crossed and leant against the dresser. Sarah pulled over her stool to oul'd John's chair, coughed behind her hand and sat down. John folded his arms; with watchful eyes stood glowering at Ted from the middle of the floor. By the door stood Frank, an amused spectator of this rustic melodrama, which, with true Irish spontaneity, had set itself playing by the Butlers' hearthstone.

Ted Ross eyed John for a moment; then plucked at his collar and took another step from the wall.

"Very good." His voice came clear and quick. "I'll keep me impudence to meself, an' say me say. John Butler, it's a good many years now since I first sat before your fire; an' it's a good while since the day your daughter Nan there an' meself began our courtin'. I needn't be tellin ye—"

"Ye needn't," said John. "We all know Queen Anne's dead. Come to the point, sir."

"Ay." Ted paused and looked John hard in the face. "Well, I'll take your good example again, John Butler; an' I'll spare me words. I'll let the ould days go, an' I'll come to the first night o' the spring weather. On that night, John Butler, yourself an' me were sittin' below on the quay there—"

"I know all about that night," said John. "'Twas the same night, Ted Ross, that ye showed yourself a ruffian, an' a coward, an' a reprobate. Take me advice, young man, an' come on another day or two."

Ted came forward, hands clenched, his face blazing.

"I'm no reprobate," he cried. "I'm no coward. I did nothin' that night I was ashamed of. I did nothin' I wouldn't do again."

"Quiet, sir," came John's hollow roar. "Keep quiet."

"I'll not keep quiet," Ted went on. "I'll say me say now if it costs me broken bones. John Butler, you're unjust; you're deluded. Heavenly hour, man, what's come over ye? What, in God's name, have I done to *you*, John Butler?"

For a breath or two, John stood, glowering at Ted.

"Done? What have ye done? D'ye see that man there?" shouted John, and pointed at Frank.

"Ah, I know, I know," Ted broke in impatiently. "I know what I did to him; but what did I do to you, John Butler, that ye should treat me like any tinker's brat? Man, ha' ye no heart? Man, d'ye not mind the ould days? Man, suppose ye were my age, an' another went carryin' off your sweetheart? Sup-

pose he did, what would ye do?" cried Ted, passionately.

John drew back.

"Eh?" said he. "What—what's that?"

"Would ye stand by," Ted went on, "an' let him take her without raisin' a hand? Would ye let the heart go from ye without a murmur? Would ye turn on your heel, an' light your pipe, an' say: 'Divil cares, an' divil take them?' Would ye, John Butler? Not you; ah, not you! An' yet ye call me a coward, an' a reprobate!"

John had been standing with bent head, looking at the tiles and rubbing his chin with his thumb; now he raised his eyes and turned to Sarah.

"What's this, Sarah?" said he. "Why didn't ye tell me?"

"Ah, quit, ye fool ye," snapped Sarah. "Quit your bleather."

"I know iverything's against me," Ted continued. "I'm no gentleman; an' I'm no scholar; an' I'm dull i' the wits, an' dull o' the tongue; an' me hands aren't white, an' me clothes aren't broadcloth. I know all that. It's only natural, I suppose," said Ted, glancing at Nan as she stood, pale and stricken, leaning against the dresser; "it's only natural that the beggar gets kicked from the door. . . ."

"I niver dreamt o' such a thing," John muttered to himself. "God knows I didn't. Nan," he said; "is this true?"

Nan did not answer. Ted broke into a cheerless laugh.

"Well," said he, looking at Sarah, "this is a danged fine piece o' play-actin', I must say! Why, next

thing," said Ted, with a jerk of his thumb, "we'll have the gentleman be the door sayin' he knows nothin' either."

"This is what brought ould Hugh these parts," John kept on, mumbling slowly to himself. "This is what he meant be all that palaver. I wonder, Sarah, ye wouldn't give me a hint, even?"

"Aw yis." Sarah's knowing eyes twinkled. "Aw yis, indeed!"

"But enough o' this," said Ted, with a pluck at his waistcoat. "I didn't come here to-night to talk bleather, nor to hear it. No. 'Twas to have a word wi' you, Mr. Frank Barry," said Ted, turning sharply and flinging out an arm; "jist to have a quiet five minutes wi' ye here, man to man an' face to face."

"I don't think you need trouble yourself, Mr. Ross," said Frank from the door. "You can say nothing—"

"Can't I?" Ted interrupted. "Well, wait an' see, Mr. Barry." Suddenly he pointed at Frank. "Look, John Butler, at the man you'd have steppin' into me shoes. Look at him, I say. There's a bully boy—a tight chap—aw, a brave, roarin' blade! He's no reprobate, John Butler; he's no coward. Coward!" shouted Ted, flinging round on his heel. "Be the King, if there's a bigger from Cork to Derry I'm ashamed o' me breed."

Frank crossed the floor and sat himself by Nan on the shelf of the dresser.

"This is all very pretty, Nan, isn't it?" said he, with a smile. "I'm sure, like myself, you must be enjoying the thing immensely?"

Nan moved away a step ; kept silent. John leant his back against the passage door and stood staring, now at Frank, now at Nan, now, with a dubious wag of the head, at Ted and Sarah. With the wondering eyes of a child, old John sat gripping his pipe and gazing blankly across Sarah's head at something or other—something, he knew not what. Ted scowled at Frank ; then spread his legs, caught his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, in as level a voice as he could command, went on.

"Ay," said he ; "it's all very pretty. It's powerful fine sport to do your danged worst wi' other people's affairs an' then to sit laughin' at the fun you've made. I'm only a country-bred lout. If ye want sport, an' there's only me in the way, sure you've only to sniff at me an' down I go, an' be damned to me. Who the blazes are you, sir?" shouted Ted, all suddenly. "What, in glory's name, is there in the face o' ye, or the breed o' ye, or the body o' ye, that's worth the snap of a rotten carrot? Ye pup! Ye coward! Ye sneakin' whelp!"

Sarah rose quickly. John came hurrying across the floor. Nan moved towards Ted. Frank folded his arms, crossed his legs, nodded at John.

"Never mind, John," said he. "There's no need for fear. I'm only hearing what I've heard often enough these last few days."

"Aw, but this is infernal!" roared John.

"Stand back, Butler," cried Ted. "Ye needn't be afeerd : I'm not goin' to lay a hand on his miserable hide."

John stood back. Sarah sat down. Nan, pale and stricken, leant on a chair, a pace or two from

the dresser. Again Ted faced Frank; again let his voice sink to a tone of every-day contempt.

"We're not well used to your sort, these parts, Mr. Frank Barry," said Ted, pacing this way and that before the dresser. "I'm thinkin' I niver met your kind before; the Lord grant I may niver clap eyes on your breed again."

"Thank you," said Frank, with a nod. "Your wish is mine."

"Aw, spare your thanks, Mr. Barry; keep them for the man that'll hang ye. But, in these parts, I'm wishful to tell ye, when a fellow wants another man's sweetheart he goes like a man an' takes his chance. He steps out; says his say; fights his fight, if it's wanted of him; takes what he gets; shakes hands—an' there's Amen for ye. That'll not be the way you like to do things, Mr. Barry. You come like a fox after a henroost, steppin' on your toes in the dark. You step into a kitchen, sit ye down, an' begin listenin' to what sweethearts are sayin'. You come talkin' to a poor girl, in your fine clothes an' boots; an' ye fire out your beautiful speeches; an' ye make yourself agreeable to the mother—"

"Aw, yis," said Sarah, with a snigger. "Aw, yis, indeed!"

"—An' ye make sport o' the man that's away at his honest work; an' ye pour your poison into the poor girl's ear—Ah yes, I know ye, Mr. Frank Barry; dang ye, I know ye!"

"You see, Nan?" said Frank. "He will have it so."

Nan did not answer; and Ted went on.

"Then, one day, off ye go wi' the poor girl an'

stay wi' her from mornin' to night; an' home ye come singin' an' laughin'—Ah, dang ye, what did ye say to her that day? Dang ye, what did ye say to change her like that? What did ye say to set her watchin' for ye from the window, an' callin' for ye."

"Ah," cried Nan at that. "Ah!"

Frank looked at Nan and his face fell grave. John and Sarah stood close together, their faces tense and shining. Ould John, still clutching his pipe, had fallen asleep. The fire flapped; the kettle sang on the crook.

"Why didn't I choke ye that night on the quay?" cried Ted, in a quick flare of wrath. "Why didn't I catch ye be the collar at Ryfield door an' trounce ye on the lawn? Ye wouldn't fight. No. Ye knew better. Ye coward! You'd talk an' talk; but ye wouldn't stand up to me an' fight it out man to man. If you'd beaten me I'd—No; danged if I would. I'd ha' fought ye for her so long as there was a whole bone in me. I would; an' I will. She's mine yet, Frank Barry, for all your devil's devices; an' mine she'll be in spite o' ye.—An' now I'll finish."

Ted turned towards John and Sarah.

"John Butler," said he, "you've heard me; an' I thank ye. I didn't mean to come trespassin' on your floor the night; but chance sent me. I was in the wood below when ye went off in the cot. That was chance too. Ye were hardly gone when the gentleman at me back, an'—an' someone else came down the lane. That was more chance. I didn't want to listen; but I heard a word or two. I did, John. He made her cry, John. He said he'd fight me, John."

Frank stepped from the dresser.

"Just a moment," said he. "But this comedy has gone quite far enough. You're making your own grievances, Mr. Ross. You're talking nonsense—"

"Am I?" interrupted Ted. "That's your opinion, Barry."

"I will speak," said Frank. "You're talking nonsense, I say. You're making ridiculous assumptions. You're insulting me—"

"I'm proud to hear it, Barry."

"I demand a hearing. John, I appeal to you."

"You'll hold your whisht, John Butler. I've got the floor an' I'll keep it."

"Nan," said Frank, "I appeal to you."

"An' so do I," shouted Ted; "so do I. Nan Butler, make your choice—now, this mortal minute. You've heard me; ye know me; ye see Barry an' ye know him. Think of the ould days; think of all you've said; think of your promises; look at me, an' look at him, an' choose between us. Choose, I say, Nan Butler."

Frank tried to speak; Ted stopped him with an oath. As pale as death, Nan stood looking at the floor, with the eyes of every one hard upon her.

"Choose," cried Ted again. "Think of the ould days—an' choose."

Hardly breathing, Nan stood before them all, her head bent, her hands hanging limp: stood stricken before them all, with loyalty beckoning her this way and love pulling her that.

"Choose," cried Ted. "It's between a man an' a coward, Nan. Think of the ould days—an' choose."

Nan drew a breath; raised her eyes and looked first

at Ted and then at Frank. And at sight of Frank's face the blood surged to her cheeks, the love-light flashed in her eyes: and she stepped to Frank's side.

Then dead silence. Like things of wood, John and Sarah stood staring at Nan. With his head thrust forward, hands clenched, face haggard and brimming with fury, Ted Ross stood solitary out on the floor. Then Sarah sniffed; John whistled softly; Frank took Nan by the arm; and like a flash Ted sprang forward.

"Oh, damn ye!" he shouted, "what have ye done to make her like this?" He took Frank by the throat and bore him back against the dresser. "Damn ye!" he shouted; "what have ye done to her?"

There was a mighty scurry. From the dresser plates came crashing down. Nan strove to loosen Ted's grip. Sarah screamed and flung her apron over her head. Ould John woke up crying: "What; what!" John shouted and hurried to the rescue. Round the two swung across the floor. Over went the chairs, the stools, the pots and cans. Frank struck Ted in the face. Ted skirled, tightened his grip and whirled Frank against the table. "Aw, shame, shame!" shouted John. "Aw, wirra wirra!" moaned Sarah beneath her apron. "What's this? What's this?" shrilled ould John from his chair. Here and there the two swung; crashed against the door, went thud against the wall, wrought havoc once more upon the dresser; whirled back to the middle of the floor, and there came down, Frank beneath, Ted, skirling like a very demon, above.

"Now I've got ye," shouted Ted. "Now, dang ye, I've got ye!"

He raised his arm ; but Nan caught it. Then over rushed John ; and out went Ted, fighting and sprawling, into the yard.

CHAPTER XIV.

"She chose me ; she loves me," murmured Frank Barry, as with head down and feet wandering among the stones, slowly he passed along the road up from Garvagh ferry. *"She chose me, chose me ; she loves me, loves me.* What of bruises and aching bone, what of all the world? *Nan chose me ; Nan loves me."*

That Nan should have chosen him! To see her step to his side ; to see her face, her eyes! Never could he forget that look ; never. It was wonderful. Worth the years of a life it was, that one great moment.

And Marian? She whom he had vowed to love for evermore ; Marian who, like Nan, had chosen him and loved him also?

What to do? He was distracted, perplexed. He loved his Marian ; he loved his Nan ; in God's name, which? Ah, Nan's face was sweet ; she herself was sweet ; fate and the world he could defy with Nan at his side. But Marian?

He must be faithful ; would be faithful. He must crush his heart ; cure himself of this folly. Nan was another's ; Marian was his ; so it must be despite of all.

But Nan ; what of Nan who had chosen him? In God's name, what to do? He was distracted ; aching from head to foot, bruised in body and soul.

The coward he had been. To tell her all there by the shore ; to wake her love ; to let her choose him ; to leave her calling good-bye from Inishrath pier, leave her with hopes and longings that might never be satisfied ! 'Twas cowardly ; aching bones and a distracted breast were not half his due. But, in Heaven's name, how keep from telling her ? He had gone to say good-bye ; 'twas the last time ; she was so sweet ; his heart overflowed ; he had to tell her.

Why had he gone ? He knew he was foolish : and went. He meant to say nothing : and spoke. Fool that he was.

Should he throw, even now, his vows to the winds, and take Nan for his own ? Marian would soon forget. No ; no ! What devil was tempting him ? Marian was his ; Nan was another's ; so it must be ; by Heaven, should be !

Yet, what to do ? thought Frank Barry, and pausing in Ryfield lane looked up at the stars—the solemn stars set in that eternal sky whence cometh man's strength. How leave Nan ? How face Marian ? It would be brutal to slink away, to go flying to Marian not leaving a word of comfort, of explanation with Nan. Yet, he must not see her again. He dared not. He must be brutal ; must slink away. Ah, but the ways of life ofttimes led poor mortals into stony places. Never to see sweet Nan again ! It was bitter cruel. And she would pine and fret ; would watch for him and wait ; would cry for him in her heart : and cry in vain.

Bah ! What folly was this, what weakness ! Let him crush himself as with an iron heel. Nan would soon forget. Her swain would hear of his going and

fly with the news, would come to his knees and beg forgiveness: then, heigh-ho for a mud-house and love and a crust. These affairs were soon born, sooner forgotten. 'Twas the way of the world. The eternal stars were weary of beholding such ironies and comedies of life. Nan would forget. But he, never could he forget. Never could he behold those stars, thought Frank Barry—and with his hand on the latch paused at the kitchen door-step—without thinking of the times, the happy times, he had walked by her side and talked sweet things beneath their splendour. She might forget; he never could: and out went the eternal stars with a push of the kitchen door.

Sally had gone to bed. A lamp glimmered on the wall. Frank kicked off his boots, put on his slippers, and went up to the parlour. The room was full of light; supper was spread; before the fire his uncle sat reading a newspaper. An open Bible lay on the table, and beside it a letter.

“For me?” asked Frank.

Hugh did not answer.

Frank took up the letter. Happy omen: it was from Marian. He sat down; at once was deep in the record of his Marian's thoughts, hopes, protestations, fears. The dear girl! Soon he should see her; soon hold her in his arms. His eyes glistened; smiles wreathed his face; visions shaped themselves in the coals.

Presently Frank sat forward, stirred the fire, lit his pipe and turned to old Hugh.

“Well, uncle,” said he. “And how goes it?”

Hugh dropped his paper; looked at Frank over his spectacles.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said he. "You've been there some time, I'm guessin'?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Ay." Hugh raised his paper. "Just so. An' ye said good-evenin', I believe, when ye came?"

Frank turned quickly.

"Really, uncle, I beg your pardon. Excuse my bad manners; but I was preoccupied."

"Ay," returned Hugh, in his driest manner. "I know." He ran his eye down a column or two; noisily turned a sheet. "Ye did what ye intended to do, this evenin', I suppose?" he asked.

"What was that, uncle? Really I forget."

"Made a fool o' yourself."

Frank lay back in his chair; smiled, whiffed steadily at his pipe; leant forward again, with his arms resting on his knees.

"Yes," said he, as if to himself. "I suppose I did make a fool of myself this evening."

"H'm!" grunted Hugh, behind his paper. He read a sentence or two; grunted again; suddenly threw his paper on the floor, pulled off his spectacles and laid them on the table. "An' when is the great event comin' off?" asked he.

Frank looked around.

"What d'you mean, uncle? What event?"

"Your marriage with Butler's daughter."

Frank laughed.

"Oh. I see. Well that, I fear, must be looked for in the very dim future."

"Indeed! I suppose it's all settled, though," Hugh kept on, in that crisp, matter-of-fact way of his; "all, we'll say, but the date?"

Again Frank laughed.

"No, uncle. Nothing's settled, date or else. You needn't be fearing—"

"I wasn't fearin'. Maybe I was hopin'?"

"Hoping, uncle?" Frank stared. "Hoping?"

"Ay. That was the word." Hugh settled himself in his chair. "I was in Inishrath, on business, this evenin'," he went on; "an' I saw the girl. I spoke to her, an' questioned her. Well," said Hugh, with a wave of his hand, "there's worse to be seen; lots worse."

Frank kept silent. Hugh knitted his brow; blinked at the fire; went on:

"I've been turnin' things over since I came back; an' it comes to me that maybe, after all, you're not such a fool as ye look. No. The land's gone to the dogs, it's true; but, with advice, a smart man might save it yet. Many a young fellow has started wi' worse. Yes. The house is a good one; there's out-houses of a kind; an' there's as much manure in the yard as'd make the island a cabbage garden. Then there's the ferry; with management, that might be made a good property too. It'd take time, an' work, an' brains; but they're common things in the world, ay, common enough."

Hugh paused. Frank shifted in his seat; still kept his eyes on his uncle's face.

"So I've been thinkin' that maybe ye might do worse, Frank Barry, then take Butler's daughter an' settle yourself on Inishrath. She'd make ye a good enough wife, I'm thinkin'; an' she might make a man o' ye. A while at the tail of a plough, or drivin' a spade, an' an odd pull in the cot to the

ferryin' 'd soon take the hump off ye, an' put a trifle o' colour in your face. Yes. You'd soon get an appetite over there; it isn't for long you'd turn up your nose at potatoes an' salt in those parts; wet feet wouldn't trouble ye a power, nor a trifle o' rain, nor a whiff o' wind from the mountain. No. It'd make a man o' ye. It'd do more for ye in a year than London'd do in five. You'd be healthier, an' happier, an' better to look at an' talk to. To be sure, there's the mother, an' the father, an' the grandfather: but, bless ye, there's worse things in life than vixens an' bletherskites; an' God in his mercy doesn't let people live always. No. Ye might do worse, Frank Barry; ye might do worse. I'd give ye my advice; I'd advance ye a trifle; I'd think o' ye in other ways. Ay, ye might do worse."

Frank laughed out.

"Good," said he. "Good for you, uncle Hugh. By Jove, it's excellent!"

Hugh turned in his chair and looked Frank up and down.

"Ay? Excellent—*by Jove!* What d'ye mean, sir?" asked Hugh sharply, with a slap on the arm of his chair.

The laughter withered in Frank's eyes.

"Surely, uncle, you were only joking?"

"Jokin', sir? Jokin'! Tell me, did ever ye know me to joke, as ye call it?"

"No. I can't say I have, uncle."

"Then keep your accusations, sir," growled Hugh. "Keep them for your own kind. This is your thanks for my troublin' to think about ye! This is

your gratitude for showin' ye how to make a man o' yourself!"

"Look here, uncle," said Frank, leaning forward; "I don't want to argue the point, but is it not a fact that you asked John Butler, not six hours ago, to shut his door against me?"

"What if I did?"

"Yet you talk as you've just done!"

"Can't I change me mind?"

"Of course. Still, you've changed it pretty completely, and pretty suddenly, I must say."

"Am I to be blamed," Hugh kept on, "because I try to keep a fool from the ditch? Am I to be blamed for changin' me mind when there's nothin' else to be done; when I see everythin' settled before my face?"

"You see nothing settled," interrupted Frank, warmly. "You've no right to make assumptions or to say what you've said. It's unjust; it's unkind."

"Unjust! Who's unjust? What assumptions have I made?"

"You've assumed that I am making love to Nan Butler; that I wished to make her my wife."

"Well?" Hugh stamped his foot.

"I say you have no grounds for such assumptions."

"No grounds; no grounds! Great powers, sir, d'ye think me a fool? D'ye think I haven't eyes, haven't ears? What have ye been doin', night after night, in Inishrath, these weeks and weeks? What have ye been goin' about wi' the girl for? What made Ted Ross come here twice to make ye fight him? No grounds! Tell me, sir, have ye no regards for that girl?"

"I had—I have the greatest regard for her."

"Haven't ye let her know your regard?"

"No. Not till—not till to-night."

"Doesn't she care for ye? Answer, sir."

"I give you my word, uncle Hugh, that till to-night I didn't know her feelings towards me."

"Your word! Answer me, sir, didn't she throw Ted Ross over for ye?"

"It seems so. But I didn't know. I give you my word, uncle Hugh, that when to-night she—she—"

"Ah, your word again! An' your shufflin' an' stammerin'! A pretty fool ye must think I am. A mighty fine impudence ye have, sir, to sit there talkin' your foolery to me. I'm unjust, indeed! I'm making assumptions, indeed! Ye tell me that, sir. Phat!" cried Hugh, swinging round in his chair. "I'm weary of ye."

Frank made as if to answer; instead, he dropped his arms across his knees and leant towards the fire.

"There's no use in talking," said he.

"Not a bit," cried Hugh.

"Not a bit," echoed Frank, "not one scrap. I can only say just this, uncle, and you may believe me or not as it seems fit to you: I have not made love to Nan Butler; I never meant to; I had no notion of offering her marriage; and I have not."

"I know," said Hugh, with a nod. "I know."

"What has occurred has not been through my seeking," Frank went on. "I have been to blame, I admit. I should have kept from Inishrath; I should not have given Nan Butler the chance to—to fall in love with me. I have been a fool, as you put it. Still, Nan Butler is a worthy girl; she has a sweet

nature; I found it hard to keep from seeing her. I fought myself, but sometimes my weakness and my foolishness got the better of me."

"I know," said Hugh, in his grim way. "I know."

"I admit fully that I have been indiscreet. I take all the blame. Believe me, uncle, I am not sitting here unpunished. No matter about that. I say only this, and only to you, uncle—I should be a proud man to-night were I free to love Nan Butler and be loved by her."

"I know," said Hugh, again. "I know."

"However, I am not free. I have weaknesses, but, thank Heaven, I have not been faithless to—to Marian."

"That's the London lassie?" asked Hugh.

"Yes."

"An' it's her you mean to marry?"

"Please God."

"I see," said Hugh, with a bob of his head.

"Well, go on."

Frank leant back.

"That's all, uncle, I think. I'm sorry I can't fall in with your scheme for making a man of me. But you see—" Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"I do. I see right well. So it's the London lassie will have ye on her hands after all? Just so. An' only for her, I suppose," asked Hugh, "it's Nan Butler would ha' got ye?"

"If you like to put it that way, uncle Hugh."

"An' only for only—say, because you're not a Mormon, or King Solomon," Hugh went on, with a corner of his eye on Frank, "who knows but ye might ha' had both o' them."

Frank laughed, lifted the poker and stirred the fire.

"Who knows, indeed?" he said.

"Ay." Hugh paused. "Well, I'm wiser now than I was an hour ago, a good deal wiser." Hugh paused again. "So that's the end of your galavant-in'? You've fooled a girl, an' made a fool o' yourself—an' there ye are."

"I haven't fooled her," cried Frank. "It's cruel to say so."

"Is it? Well, well. For all that it'll please me if the word stands. Not that I pity her; not one bit. I think she's about as lucky a girl as there's to be found within twenty miles o' Ryfield gate-post this night."

"You mean—"

"I mean that she missed you, Frank Barry."

The two looked at each other; then Frank dropped his eyes.

"Ah, yes," said he. "It's easy to be bitter—and unjust."

"Is it?" answered Hugh. "Ye mean I'm too truthful. Well, here's another mouthful o' bitterness for ye: The woman I pity is the woman that gets ye."

"Thanks," said Frank.

"Ye can keep them," said Hugh. "I wouldn't for twenty pounds," he kept on, "Nan Butler had the burden of ye. She's worth ten o' ye. You'd break her heart inside a year. The first face that wasn't as ugly as Satan's 'd bring ye flyin' after it like a moth round a candle. A moth? Sure it's insultin' the moth. You've a backbone o' straw, Frank Barry,

you're unstable as water; your father was like ye, but he was a giant beside ye. A man! A man that's engaged to be married, that means to be married, to keep runnin' night an' day after a girl he only wants to play with, an' drop when he's tired—"

Frank sprang to his feet.

"Enough of this," he cried. "I've been insulted often and long enough. It's intolerable. In heaven's name," he cried, "what would you have me do? Why do you turn the tables on me like this? Would you have me be faithless to Marian?"

"I'd have ye do nothin'," answered Hugh. "I'd have ye do just what ye meant to do, or just what ye think you'll do: nothin' more or less."

"Answer me, uncle Hugh," cried Frank again. "Would you have me faithless to Marian?"

"I'd have ye do nothin', I say," Hugh repeated. "But if ye ask me what I think ye might ha' done, I'll answer ye."

"What?" said Frank.

"Kept your charms for the London women—an' fooled *them*."

Frank turned on his heel and strode across the room.

"Oh, I'm sick of it!" He wheeled and flung out his arms. "Before God," he cried, "I don't believe there's a more cruelly treated man in the world this night. I've been threatened, insulted, beaten, misunderstood; I've been called a fool and a knave; I've acted innocently and been taken by the throat; I've done my best and been set in the wrong. I'm sick of it. And now, you;" he pointed at his uncle; "you turn upon me and give me of your sarcasm and bit-

terness? You would *not* hear me; would *not* understand. Bah! These yokels—their feet of clay and minds of mud! Thank God, I'm quit of them," cried Frank, flinging across the floor. "Thank God the days of my fooling are over. I wish I were gone. I wish to Heaven I had never come."

Hugh rose; turned his back on the fire and spread his legs.

"That's better," said he; "that's the way to talk. Dang me, Frank, if there isn't something o' the man in ye after all. Ay."

"Oh, man be hanged!" cried Frank. "I'm as good a man as you."

"You'll be a better when I'm dead," was Hugh's answer. "Yes. Well; it's late an' I must be movin'. When did ye say ye were goin', Frank?"

"The sooner the better."

"The morrow, maybe?"

"Yes; to-morrow."

"Ay. Well, we'll be sorry to lose ye."

"Oh, spare me that."

Hugh moved from the hearth.

"All right, me son; all right. Well; I'll see about gettin' ye off the morrow. I will. Sometime after dinner'll do, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Right. Good night to ye."

Hugh stepped for the door. Frank watched him a moment; then strode and clutched his arm.

"Look here, uncle," said he. "You've been hard on me—damned hard. I'm not so bad as you make out. Come; we mustn't part like this."

Hugh turned, laid his hand on Frank's shoulder.

"It's all right, me son," said he. "I forgive ye a lot for that bit o' temper ye showed. I liked that. Show more of it, an' think less o' yourself, an' stiffen your back. That's all ye want—that an' a trifle less taste for the petticoats. To be sure. An' for me : well, I'm an ould man, an' like to talk ; but, God bless ye, there's no teeth behind me bark. Not a tooth. I mean well, sometimes ; and sure if I didn't mean well to you I'd be a hopeless ould ragamuffin." He put out his hand. "Lay it there, me boy. Good-night, an' God bless ye."

Frank gripped Hugh's hand.

"Good-night, uncle. And God bless you."

"Ay. I hope He will," said Hugh from the door ;
"I hope He will. If He does I'll get more than I deserve. Good-night, me son."

CHAPTER XV.

So Frank packed his bag ; bade the tearful Sally good-bye ; and across the fields set out with old Hugh towards the shore. The day was beautiful ; spring sang in every hedge and shouted on all the hills ; the sky shone gloriously ; the fields lay throbbing with life ; fair and smiling, old Ireland held revel beneath the sun.

Hugh was in good humour. The long days were here ; the land was warming ; work was in swing ; at last the sun had come to scatter his bounty, to speed the plough, bless the spade, bid the earth yield of her increase. He was sorry Frank was going : still, it was all for the best, and work left no man freedom to grieve. The youngster was going ; let him go. Ireland was no place for him, its people no companions. He was soft, easily led ; he was a citizen, a bookworm, a man in petticoats : let him go. 'Twas best, thought Hugh, and looked at Frank, as head on breast and feet trailing the grass, silently he walked along. In a day or two he would forget his foolishness, would have other things to think about ; in a day or two the old parlour at Ryfield would be just as it used to be. In a day or two ? No. Confound it, he would miss the lad ; would miss his face and his jabber ; would miss worrying about him and arguing with him. Ay ; he knew it well.

But what nonsense was this? thought Hugh. Beginning to dote, he was. He turned and smote Frank on the back.

"Come," said he; "have ye nothin' to say to me, Frank? What's ailin' ye, me son?"

Frank looked up.

"Oh, nothing much, uncle." Frank smiled. "I'm—well, you see, I'm a little emotional by nature, and partings are trying sometimes. I've been here a good while—and I've had a good time—and you've been very kind to me—and, to tell the truth, uncle Hugh, I'm not glad I'm going."

Hugh walked on. This kind of talk would never do.

"Pooh, pooh," he said. "Rubbish, Frank, rubbish. Man, we're not children."

"No, uncle. Still, I keep to what I said. Even the fields," said Frank, stopping to look about him, "and the hedges, and the mountain over there, seem like old friends that I don't want to leave. They have taken hold of me. Think of it, uncle. I'm going now, and I may never see them again—never."

"Is it the fields?" asked Hugh. "Well, dang me, if I'd let that trouble me. Taken hold of ye, indeed! Ay, an' often wet your feet. Come on, sir, an' quit your bleather," cried Hugh; then, as if fearing lest Frank, at the last moment, should repent of his going, hurried on, wound up the hills and through the rushes; descended at last and came to the shore, and to James the herd sitting by it in his little cot.

Frank's bag lay on the crutches; away across the lake a horse and car stood waiting. So this was the end, thought Frank, the very end. A minute he

stood looking at the stones; then, a dry lump in his throat and tears in his eyes, wheeled round and shot out his hand.

“Good-bye, uncle Hugh. And thank you—thank you for all your kindness.”

“Bleather, Frank.” Hugh’s grip closed hard and tight. “Nonsense, man. Thank your stars when they send ye to Parliament. Good-bye, Frank; safe home, an’ God keep ye. Now, in ye go; an’ hurry across, James, hurry across.”

Frank stumbled into the cot and sat down. James pushed off. A wave of the hand, a shout from the shore; and ’twas good-bye Garvagh.

James bent to his oars and fell to talking. ’Twas the great spring weather, so it was; ’twas grand to feel the sun warming the ould bones in one. And, sure, ’twas a thousand pities Mr. Frank was going so soon. All the tail of the winter he had had; now, when things were brighter, off he had to go. Still, maybe it couldn’t be helped; ’deed no. An’, sure, Mr. Frank was going away looking in the best of health, thank God. Five times a better-looking man he was that mortal day than the first time James had seen him. “Ye mind that day, Mr. Frank?” asked James. “Man, but I was glad to see ye.”

“Ah, yes, James,” answered Frank, sitting there by his bag, cheek in hand. “Too well I remember it.”

“An’ now you’re off again, Mr. Frank; away on your travels. Well, God speed ye; but, dear knows, I’m sorry to see ye goin’. Who knows what may happen ’tween this an’ when you’ll be comin’ back? Who knows if iver we’re to see other again?”

Frank dared not answer. Hurriedly he looked away; and there, far across the stretch of bright waters, Inishrath lay gleaming in the sunshine, and there was the white cottage above the trees, there the pier, there the lane up and down which Nan and he had passed so often. Nan and he? And now he was going; and who could tell whether he might ever see Inishrath again; ever see Nan again.

Think of the first time he had seen her, that bitter March day five weeks ago; of her talk, her welcome, of her lovely face and voice. And now he was going, slinking off, and dared not call her to the ferry; was going without so much as saying good-bye! Think of the night before; of her face as she chose him, her eyes as she looked at him. And now he was going! Think of the days, the happy days, that had seen him over there; there on the pier, on the hill, in Nan's garden. And now he was going! "Pull, James, or we'll be late. Pull, James, for God's sake!"

"Eh? What?" asked James, leaning on his oars. "What ails ye, Mr. Frank?"

"Nothing, James; nothing. Only pull."

The cot glided swiftly towards the Lismahee pier. James ceased talking. Frank sat staring before him, striving not to think, to look.

'Twas the last time; a little while longer and he should see Inishrath no more. Ah, the dear, barren place; the dear old house; the never-to-be-forgotten lane and fields. Good Heavens! There on the pier stood Nan!

Dared he look? She was there still; her white apron fluttering in the wind, a can in her hand. Now she raised the can; now stooped and dipped; now

rested hands on hips and stood looking across the lake. What was she doing, thinking? Was she thinking of him? Was she longing for the night and the sound of his foot, the sound of his voice? And he was going; and she did not know; and never might he see her again! "Oh, pull, James; pull for God's sake."

"I am, Mr. Frank. Man, we're nearly there. Man, what ails ye?"

"Nothing, James. Only pull."

The cot came to the Lismahee pier, swung round; again Frank's eyes were on Inishrath. She was there still; looking across the waters, at him maybe; wondering, perhaps, what was afoot there on the Lismahee side. Ah, the sweet figure. Let him look at it once more. *Now, good-bye, Nan; good-bye, my dear!*

Frank rose; walked up the pier; shook hands with the sorrowful James; put his foot on the car-step and mounted. One last look, just one. She was there still; there by the shining shore.

"Are ye right, sur?"

"Yes—yes."

A crack of the whip, a bound and a jolt, a shout from James; and they were off. Could he see her still? He grasped the rail and stood up. Yes; there she was. He waved his arm. *Oh, good-bye, Nan; good-bye.* He could see her still—still—still. *Oh, good-bye, Nan.* Now she stooped; took up her can; turned: was gone.

The stones rattled beneath the wheels; the horse strained in the shafts; the hedges flew past. Now came the hills, the little fields; now the brown flats of bog-land; now the last glimpse of the lake.

Frank leant an elbow on the well-cushion; laid head on hand and closed his eyes. Ah, but he felt lonesome, heartsore. He could see her now; see her standing on the pier, the dark trees behind her, the blue sky above, the lake shining away on either hand. She was thinking of him; longing for sight of him. Now she was going up the lane, singing in her joy. Now she was at the door; now she turned a moment and the sun flashed on her face. Nan's face; that face he might never see again! He shot upright in his seat; grasped the rail tight; sat frowning down at the road. Never see her again? Oh, 'twas cruel bitter!

The car flew on. The hills, cottages, bogs fell behind; far back, Garvagh woods were now but a long streak on the horizon; away in front, the roofs of Lismahee shone out. He was going; slinking away as cowards slink from the sun. He was leaving Nan, leaving her to pine and wring her heart; leaving her without a word. The coward he was, the pitiful cur. What would she think of him? What could she think? She chose him; gave herself to him: and now he was going without a word. He could not do it. He turned to the driver.

"Stop," shouted he; and even as he spoke repented of the word. He was weak again. What could he say to Nan? Could he bear to see the light die on her face? "Drive on," said he. "Drive on."

The car crossed the railway track; spun on between the hedges, rattled over the stones. There was Lismahee, there the church, the poorhouse walls. It was not yet too late. Think of seeing her watch for him; of coming to her, even to say good-bye.

Think of seeing her again, hearing her voice, feeling her hand lie warm in his. He must see her. Come what might, he must see her again. He leant across and clutched the reins.

"Stop," he shouted. "I've forgotten something. You must turn back. Quickly, quickly; back, I say."

The driver pulled up; turned.

"Is it back to the shore, ye mean?" said he. "Drive the horse all that way, wi'out a rest or a bite in its throat? Arrah, whisht!"

Frank sprang off the car.

"Then go on. Leave my bag at the hotel, and say I'll come for it." He tossed half a crown upon the well-cushion. "There's something for you," he said; then turned on his heel and set back for the shore. And as he went, the Piper played him adown the stony road, between the hedges.

The afternoon was wearing old when Frank turned his back on Lismahee; the sun was sinking when he came to the ferry. He hurried to the flag-staff; there paused and bethought him. Suppose he waited until night had come, then shouted and perchance brought Nan to the ferrying? That would be sweet. Think of her cry of welcome; think of sitting beside her, under the eternal stars, all the way to Inishrath. That would be glorious. He could tell her all, as the cot glided on; make parting sweet and lay up store of fond remembrance. Yes, yes. He turned from the flag-staff; seated himself on the pier; there sat looking fondly towards Inishrath and restlessly awaiting the dark.

How breathlessly peaceful all things lay and saw descend the merciful cloak of the night! Not a

sound, not a stir; everywhere the solemnity and majesty of Nature. This was life, this freedom; here men were dowered with gifts inestimable. What was trade, wealth, the tramp of countless feet, the surge of myriad life, the hum of ungodly cities? Mere vanities, ironies, enormities. But this, all this: pure sky, sweet earth, solemn silence, day flying sorrowfully, night pacing majestically: this indeed was the crown and glory of things. He could spend his life there; spend it well and bountifully. A little work; a simple home; perfect health; bright days; glad nights; and beside him—Ah Nan, Nan!

But see. The stars were out; night had come; a light was twinkling above the trees in Inishrath. 'Twas time. He rose; between his hands called across the water; restlessly began pacing to and fro. Hark! Was that the rattle of oars? Yes. No. Again he called: *Ahoy-Ahoy-Ahoy-y-y!* Hush! Did he hear Nan's voice? No. Louder he called; louder still; shouted till his throat ached. And still no answer. He paced the shore; whistled; skirled; stamped on the stones, at last, and swore. Here was a predicament. Miles from Lismahee; alone on a barren shore; not a boat; not a soul he knew; nothing for him but a weary tramp back to the town. Back from Nan? Back without seeing her? Not if he swam for it!

He ran here and there, whistling, shouting, stumbling; at last, far along the shore, in the skirts of a white-thorn clump, came upon a cot that lay, in her rottenness, half full of water and chained to a tree. It was no godsend: still, hurrah. He baled out; broke the chain between two stones; shoved and was off.

The thole pins were broken, the oars mere poles, the thwart too short; every hundred yards he had to bale for his life; it seemed miles from shore to shore: blessed it was, at last, to come thud on the stones, and to have mother earth once more beneath his feet.

And now for Nan. But softly. He must surprise her; give no sign till the latch rattled and in he went. He stole up the lane; trod on tip-toe past the broken gate and across the yard; went stealthily along the house wall, steadying himself with a hand sliding along the stones. Softly. There was the kitchen window. But dark! He pressed his face against the glass and peered. Only blackness. His heart sank. He crept to the door, lifted the latch and pushed. Firm as a rock. He stepped back, stumbled on the stones; instantly the dog in the stable began to bark. The brute! With his back against the wall, he waited till the noise ceased; then stealthily made for the lane. Again the dog barked. The cur! He sat down on the ditch and wiped his brow. Oh, the miserable disappointment; the cruel luck! But he must do something. In Heaven's name, what? Go back; back without seeing Nan? No—no! He longed to see her. He must see her. Was there no way? Could he do nothing? Stay! Yes; yes' . . .

Cautiously, Frank went down the lane; turned through the green gate; trod noiselessly along the path; came soon to the little garden and stopped below Nan's window. It was closed, dark. He gathered a handful of mould, scattered it against the glass; with his heart leaping in his throat, stood back and waited. Was she never coming? Again he

flung; again waited breathlessly. Why did she not come? He picked pebbles from the path and crashed them against the panes. Surely now she must come. Yes. There was her dear face. At last; at last!

Frank stretched up his arms.

"Nan," he called. "Oh, Nan, Nan. Open, my dear."

A moment's delay. The window swung out. Nan leant over the sill and looked down.

"Is it you, Frank?" she called softly. "Is it you?"

"Yes, Nan, yes. Oh, I'm so glad to see you. I—I couldn't go, Nan, without seeing you. I couldn't. I wanted to surprise you. I found all dark. I tried the door."

"Hush, Frank," Nan whispered. "They'll hear ye. Ah, I'm glad to see ye down there. Was I—was it hard to wake me?"

"Were you asleep, Nan; really, were you?"

"Surely. But why didn't ye come sooner? I watched for ye all the evenin'."

"Did you, Nan? Watched for me? And you wanted me to come to you?"

"Ah, yes. I did, Frank."

"And now I've—" Could he tell her? Could he see the pain gather on that face; quench the brightness in those eyes? How sweet she looked in the half darkness; her hair streaming down upon the sill, her hands folded below her chin, her dear face bright with the smiles of her love for him. How could he leave her? How could he live without her? He stepped upon the path and stretched up his arms.

"Nan, Nan," he called, passionately; "I can't leave

you. I can't go. I'll give up all—" His feet crunched upon the gravel. Round in the yard once more the dog began to bark. Nan waved her hand and drew back her head. Frank muttered an oath and let his arms drop. In a while the dog grew quiet. Again Nan's face showed at the window.

"Ye must be quiet, Frank," she said, softly. "Ye mustn't wake them. Say, good-bye, dear, for this time, an' go. Do."

"No, no, Nan. I mustn't go yet. I mustn't. Oh, I want to tell you—"

"Hush, Frank. Ah, hush."

"Then come down to me, Nan."

Nan shook her head.

"No, Frank. Ah, no."

"Do, Nan. I must feel your hand—must kiss you—just once. Do, Nan."

"I can't, Frank. Ah, no."

"But you must, Nan. I've so much to say. I want to tell you. Before God, Nan, I can't leave you. I'm in your hands. If you tell me to stay, I'll stay; if you tell me to go, I'll go. Come to me, Nan."

But Nan, not knowing, not even guessing, shook her head again.

"Not now," she answered. "Ah, not now."

"Only to the door," pleaded Frank. How sweet she was; how beautiful. "Come down," he cried. He stepped upon the path, his arms out, his face upturned. "Come down to me, Nan."

The dog barked again; someone stirred inside the house; but to the ears of these two, the one standing pleading, the other standing wavering, came not a sound.

"Come down to me, Nan."

"Ah, Frank, Frank—"

How sweet she was. Barry crept closer to the wall. How beautiful she was. Closer he crept; his breath surging, his eyes gleaming.

"Nan," he whispered, "come and open to me. Let me in! Let me in!—"

A sound in the hall; a thud against the inside of the door; then John's voice, shouting:

"Who's there? Answer, or I'll fire."

Barry sprang back.

"Who is it?" came again. "Damn ye, answer quick."

"No, John, no. It's Frank—Frank Barry."

"You're a liar. That's not his voice."

Barry recovered himself; stepped to the door and rapped softly.

"It's all right, John," he said. "Forgive me for disturbing you, but I was late in coming and I just wanted to say a word to Nan. Go to bed, like a good man, and good-night to you. . . . No, no; I've got a cot, thank you. . . . No, no; I couldn't touch a drop if you had gallons of it. . . . Yes, I know I'm a rascal. But, John, you were young yourself once, weren't you? . . . Yes, I thought so. Good-night, John; good-night. . . . Thank God, you're rid of. And now—"

He raised his face; there, above Nan's window-sill, was a frilled night-cap and within it the yellow face of Sarah Butler. With an oath Barry drew back. For a breath the two stared at each other; then spoke Sarah:

"So, it's you, is it?" Her voice was big with

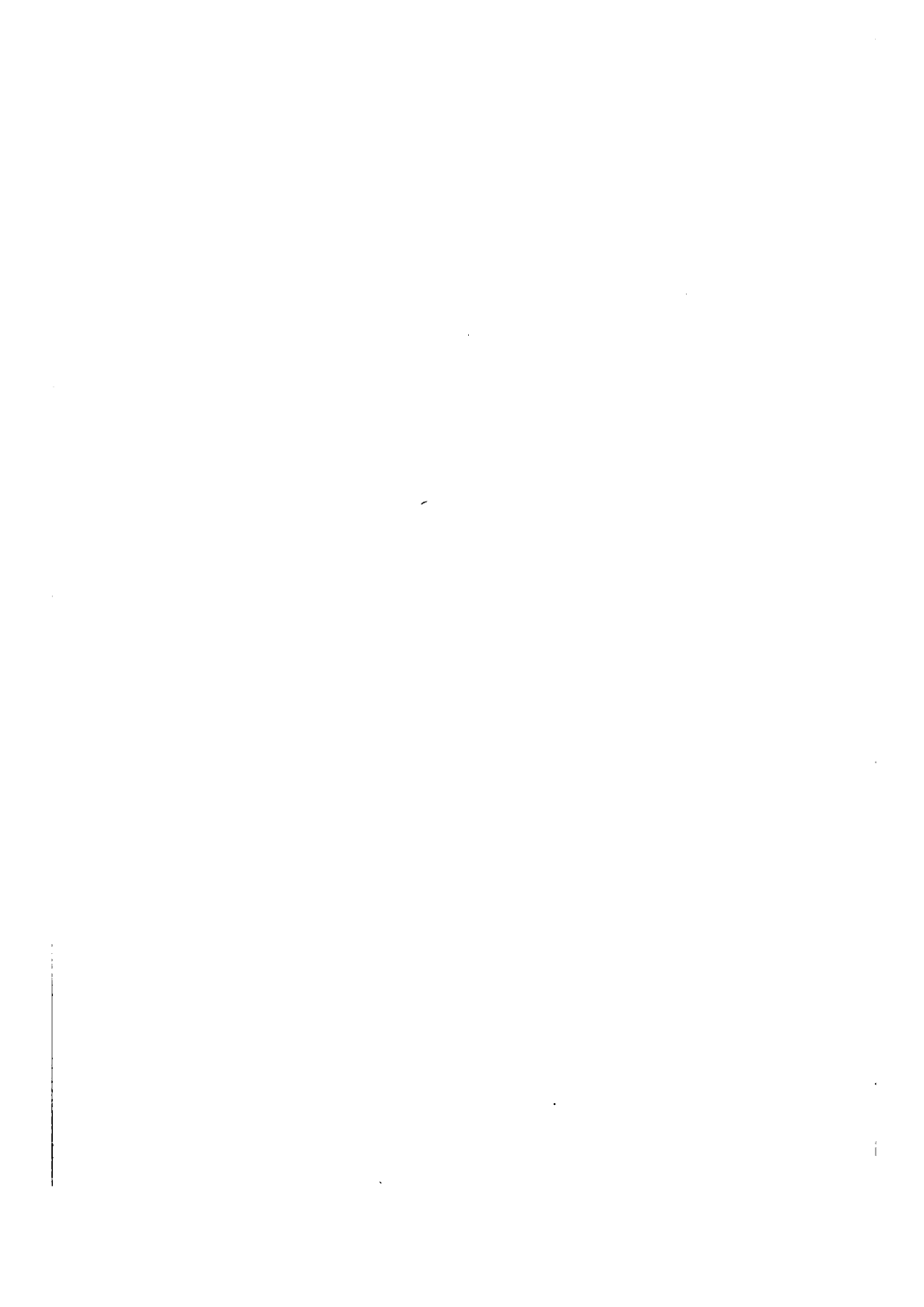
meaning. "It's you, Mr. Frank Barry? You'll be late out."

Barry did not answer.

"I was thinkin' I knew your voice," Sarah went on. "Ye forgot yourself, I'm thinkin', an' raised it too much. Ay." She drew back her head. "Well, I'll not be keepin' ye, Mr. Barry, out in the night air. It's bad for the health. But next time ye come, maybe the dure'll be open for ye. An', whisht," said Sarah, pushing her head beyond the sill; "next time ye come on your divilments, be mindin' that dogs an' ould women have ears. Good-night to ye."

And Nan's window closed with a bang.

BOOK II.
LONDON.



BOOK II.

LONDON.

CHAPTER I.

ON this side of the fire, sat Frank Barry ; on that, Marian his wife. Both were reading : Frank lying back in an easy-chair, pipe in mouth, legs stretched and crossed ; Marian seated on a low stool, cheek in hand and a book in her lap. At Frank's elbow, on a table, a tumbler containing whisky and water stood among a litter of books and papers ; on the mantel-shelf, above Marian's head, stood an empty wine glass among the photographs.

The room (usually called the Study) was small, cheerful ; lined with books, hung with prints and portraits of literary celebrities ; lighted by a shaded lamp ; set here and there with wicker chairs, pots of ferns, knickknacks of various kinds. The carpet was strewn with fringed mats, scraps of paper, odds and ends of dress stuff. A table by the wall held a sewing machine, a work-basket, a roll of paper patterns, some lengths of lace and a bundle of linen. An evening paper lay crumpled at Frank's feet. A society journal lay on the hearthrug beside Marian's

stool. The room had an untidy appearance, an air at once of disorder and of comfort. The curtains were drawn ; the door almost closed. A big fire was burning ; for it was early spring and the nights were cold.

The Barrys lived in furnished apartments—first-floor dining-room, second-floor bedroom, and this study of Frank's—near the Kennington end of Camberwell New Road. The neighbourhood, they found, offered advantages in the shape of cheap rents and markets, good air and modest requirements ; advantages all of them not to be despised by a young couple of slender means and a family of one, a fine boy, called Frank, just then some sixteen months old. Moreover, Camberwell was Marian's birthplace, and close by in the Leipzig Road, lived her father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Dent. Furthermore, their present landlady, a worthy person enough, had been Frank's in the old days, and his present study had once been his den.

They were married in the summer following the days of Frank's adventures in Ireland—nearly three years before. The current of their lives ran smoothly enough and not unhappily. Marian was a good wife ; Frank above the average of husbands. He had changed but slightly in those three years—somewhat paler, a little less robust, a slight thinning among the curls above his forehead, another wrinkle or two in his brow, another line or two, of experience, of weakness, on his face : that was all. Sometimes, when women were in sight, for instance, he gave Marian cause for uneasiness ; occasionally he had long fits of depression, abstraction ; now and then, in the days maybe when work was speeding and

fame came luring, he rose to fine heights of amiability and good spirits. He was still a literary man: a writer of reviews, paragraphs, articles, tags of verse. Editors were kind. Work was in plenty. Seldom now did the wolf come snarling. He wrought hard; lived in hope; and, for the rest, was sitting there before the fire whilst Marian his wife ran a critical and sympathetic eye over the pages of his first book, not that great novel of which we have already heard, but another and a slighter work, in which, hastily and not very successfully, it must be said, he had embodied some of the first fruits of his observation and experience.

They read in silence for some little time. Occasionally Marian looked up, turned towards the door and appeared to be listening; frequently Frank lowered his book and shot a quick look, a hungry look you might call it, at his wife's face. At last, he took a sip of whisky and water; dabbed at the fire with the poker; filled and lighted a fresh pipe; then rested elbows on knees, and with that old smile of his playing about his lips, turned to Marian.

"Well, old girl," said he. "And how goes it?"

Marian closed the book on her thumb; leant forward and looked at the fire. She was a handsome woman; features full, round and regular; brows broad and clearly marked; lips firm; chin strong; hair beautiful and abundant; eyes frank and deep and calm.

"Oh, nicely, thank you, Frank." Her voice came clear and rich. "And you?"

Frank spread his hands to the blaze; raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders.

"I? Oh, I'm all right," said he. "A bit tired, you know, and lazy."

Marian did not answer. Frank looked a while at his hands; then turned again.

"I'm afraid you're bored a little to-night, my dear," said he; suddenly crossed his legs and leant over the arm of his chair. "Come now. Confess. Aren't you bored to death?"

Marian looked round; searched Frank's eyes and smiled.

"Ah, you vain fellow," said she, with a shake of her head. She raised Frank's book. "Is it *this*?" she asked, and smiled again.

"Yes, it's *that*. I've been watching you this half hour; twenty times has my pipe gone out; twenty times I've thought you were going to say—say something. I'm as nervous—Oh, bother. Honestly, Marian—honestly, mind, what do you think of it?"

Eagerly Frank leant over the arm of his chair, eyes shining, his fingers twitching; slowly Marian turned her face to the fire.

"Honestly, Marian. Honestly."

"Well, honestly, Frank—I like it." Very deliberately Marian spoke. "I never expected you could do so well with fiction. It's—really, parts of it are excellent."

Frank sat back in his chair.

"Damned with faint praise," he muttered. He joined his finger-tips; looked at the fire and sighed. "Ah well," he murmured dolefully. "Ah, well."

Marian turned to him.

"You asked me to be honest with you, Frank."

"I know, my dear; I know."

"And I am," Marian went on; "I'm trying to be very honest. Surely you wouldn't have me say what I don't mean, Frank!"

"Of course not. Certainly not."

Marian opened the book, laid her hands upon it and fell to twisting her rings.

"You see, Frank, I'm not very clever. You mustn't expect too much of me. And, you know, I never did enjoy stories of country life very much. Did I?"

Frank fidgeted in his chair.

"Oh, it's all right, dear," he said. "Don't worry. I know exactly. You're disappointed." He sighed again. "Ah, well; it'll all come right some day."

"Frank," said Marian, raising her eyes; "don't be unjust. I am *not* disappointed. I am very proud of you. I've read every word; and see;" she raised the book; "I'm not quite through it."

Frank nodded; smiled; kept his eyes on the fire. There came a short pause.

"Frank, what do you want me to say?"

"Nothing, dear; nothing. I quite understand." Frank rapped the ashes from his pipe on the bar of the grate. "I know I'm foolish. Only—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Only what, Frank?"

"Well, I thought, perhaps, you might disagree a little more with the critics."

"I do, Frank. I hate them."

"Yes. Hate them and agree with them."

"Frank, it's cruel of you to say that."

"It is slipshod," Frank continued, with a curl of

his lip. "It is rambling, amateurish. Amateurish! As though I were a school-girl."

Quick words were on Marian's tongue. She checked them, and leaning her cheek on her hand looked at Frank. Poor fellow. Oh, those brutes of critics! And she was unsympathetic, hard. She reached out her hand; all at once rose, went to the door, and stood listening—a fine picture, in her sweet grace, of young motherhood.

"I thought I heard the little man," she said, coming back. "Bless him, what a sleep he is taking." She knelt by Frank's chair and took his hand. "And now let me lecture my dear old boy. Really, Frank, you must not worry so. After all, what of the critics? They don't know everything; they *must* make mistakes. And what good can worrying do?"

"I know," Frank broke in. "But who can help worrying," he cried, "when he sees himself misunderstood, vilified? When this man is unjust, and that man brutal....."

"Yes, Frank; yes."

"Great heavens, the work I've put into that book, the experience, the observation! The care I've had; the drudgery it has cost me. And then—then to find I've cast my pearls before swine—"

"I know, Frank; I know."

"Before God, Marian," cried Frank, swinging round in his chair. "I often think I'd be a happier man with the life and ambitions of a city clerk. Look at the work I do; see the reward. Look at the ambitions I have; see their result. Bah!" He flung round again. "What's the good of talk? What's the confounded good of anything?"

Marian slipped down on the hearthrug and sat reading the fire. Had Frank said truth? Would he be a happier man with the pale face, black coat, everlasting routine, narrow means and hopes of a city drudge? She wondered. Would she be a happier woman? She wondered again. Some things then might be gained; some things spared. Frank was altering. He was getting a little hard, morose; a little careless, maybe. Three years? And three years more?

Dead silence held the room for a while; then Frank leant forward and laid a hand on his wife's shoulder.

"Forgive me, Marian," he pleaded. "Forgive me, my dear. I'm ashamed of myself. Forget what I've said; and forgive me. Won't you?"

"Why, of course, Frank." Marian looked up. "Of course."

"I was absurd. It was all those brutes—But there. Let them be."

Frank rose; picked his book from Marian's stool and, with his back to the fire, stood turning its pages. "After all," he went on; "it's not so bad. Even the most malevolent cannot deny that there's a spark of promise here and there. Eh, Marian?"

"Yes, Frank."

"That scene, for instance, by the lake shore, when the hero tries to say good-bye and, instead, wanders weakly into a declaration of love. That's good, I know. Eh, Marian?"

"I thought it very curious, Frank."

"Yes? And the setting of it? The black trees, the silent shore, the stretch of lonely waters, the cot-

tage on the hillside, the wooden pier, the boats lying beside it. Eh, Marian, what did you think of that?"

"It is admirable, Frank. I could picture it all quite clearly."

"Good, good for me! And the heroine, little black-eyed Nancy? How did you like her, Marian?"

"Ah, poor girl; poor child. My heart bled for her. That cruel fellow!"

Frank winced. He lowered his book.

"You don't like the hero, then, Marian?"

"No. I don't, Frank." Marian looked up. "Surely you didn't expect me to like him?"

Frank turned away; for a moment swayed to and fro.

"Well," he answered; "perhaps not. Still, he deserves some pity. He was weak."

"Miserably weak."

Frank winced again.

"He was. No doubt he was. But, you see, Marian, he is a kind of study. He has the artistic temperament. He is emotional. Surely, he is to be forgiven something for the sake of his frailties, of what, by nature, he could not help?"

"No." Marian shook her head. "No."

"But, Marian. Think, my dear. We are none of us perfect. . . Now, this man was very human, very imperfect; I don't wish to defend him; still—"

Again Marian shook her head.

"It's no use, Frank, trying to argue the matter. I can only tell you that I hate the fellow."

Frank smiled knowingly: a man's smile at a wo-

man's reason.

"Well, well," said he. "So my poor hero stands condemned. You hate him, Marian?" he asked, and looked furtively down at his wife. "You find nothing to like in him at all?"

"He is untrue, Frank," answered Marian, in her decisive way; "and a weakling, and a coward. That is quite enough for me."

Frank stooped to stir the fire. He had no wish further to hear Marian's opinion of this hero of his: this hero with a character and a record perilously like his own. It was just like Marian, he thought. No mercy for weakness; no pardon for frailty; no perception of the very narrow path which, in this mortal world of ours, ever separates the sheep from the goats. That hero of his had faults, even as he himself had; had virtues, too, even as he. . . .

"Frank," said Marian, from her place by his chair.

"Yes, my dear."

"Did you ever meet any of the people in your story? Are any of them drawn from real life?"

Frank dropped the poker.

"From real life?" said he; then paused and appeared to consider. "Hm. Let me see. Well, no, Marian; not any of them in their entirety. They are things of shreds and patches. Of course I have drawn upon my experience; what novelist does not? But I have idealised, selected. No; they were never real. But why do you ask?"

Marian had been looking up at Frank; now she dropped her eyes.

"Oh, I have no particular reason, Frank. It was

only a fancy. And the story, is that, too, an invention ? ”

“ Yes,” answered Frank. “ Certainly. But why do you ask *that*, Marian ? ”

“ Really, Frank, I don’t know ; except that sometimes I seemed to be reading of things that had actually happened.”

“ Ha ! One for me,” said Frank ; “ one for me.”

“ That scene by the lake shore, for instance,” Marian went on. “ Well, it gave me the idea that you must have seen it or heard about it.”

“ Oh, dear no,” said Frank, and swayed to and fro. “ Oh, dear me, no.”

Marian looked up.

“ And Nancy ? You never met or heard of a girl like that ? ”

An ugly frown gathered on Frank’s brow.

“ No,” he answered. “ Surely, Marian, you know I have not.”

“ Yes ? Oh, it’s nothing. I was only wondering if you had heard of her when you were in Ireland. You see, Frank, you have never been quite open with me about that time.”

A flush rose to Frank’s cheek ; his eyes took a sudden glitter.

“ My dear, I have been quite open,” he said. “ How often am I to repeat it ? Really, Marian, these suspicions. . . .”

And just then, mercifully it might seem, someone knocked at the study door.

CHAPTER II.

FRANK crossed to the door, pulled it open ; and at once his face brightened.

"Hello, Rab." The welcome in his voice was strangely blended with relief. "It's you, is it? Well, you are a fellow. Standing there knocking as though you were a beggar. Oh, come in," cried Frank, with a laugh, and plucked at the visitor's sleeve ; "come in with you."

There entered a tall, angular man, wrapped in a loose cloak, a muffler round his neck and a tweed hat in his hand. Slowly, awkwardly he came to the fire ; shook hands with Marian and spoke a conventional word or two in response to her greeting ; then turned and stood blinking at the lamp. He seemed shy. His face was solemn, impassive. His shoulders drooped ; his arms hung limp.

"'Pon my word," Frank kept on as he closed the door ; "this is a pretty way to treat your friends, Mr. Rab. To come sneaking up the stairs, and stand gently rapping at our chamber door. A pretty way, indeed ! Eh, Marian, what do you think of him?"

Marian's face was still grave. At sight of Frank's dancing eyes, she smiled ; but said nothing.

"Well, you old raven." Frank laid his hands on Rab's shoulders and swayed him to and fro. "How's the world using you ? Lord ; but you look solemn.

Man, you're as pinched and cold-looking as charity itself. Here, off with your duds." Frank flung Rab's hat upon the table, pitched his muffler into a corner, pulled off his cloak and hung it over a picture; then wheeled a chair before the fire and dropped a cushion upon its seat. "Now," said he, breaking into hideous mimicry of a Scotch dialect, "doon ye sit, ma sonny. An' mak yoursel comfortable; an' stretch your lang legs; an' ha' your wee bit smoke; an' what'll ye hae, ma braw son o' a Hielan' lardie?"

Laughing noisily, Frank turned to the cupboard for glass and decanter; smiling to herself, as much at the shy seriousness that lay upon Rab's face as at Frank's hilarity, Marian crossed the room for her work-basket; slowly, awkwardly, Rab sat down. Seen without cloak and muffler he looked leaner and more angular than ever. His knees jutted sharp; his shoulder blades bulged beneath his brown jacket; as he fumbled for tobacco, his elbow threw into clear relief the bare patches on the velvet. His jaw was lank; his wrists and hands big and bony. For all that, he made a striking figure. He had a fine head; large, well-shaped, admirably poised. His hair was iron-grey, thick and wavy; his face was rugged and powerful, with a great brow, large nose, and high cheek-bones. His lips were firm; his eyes deep set, and in them a fine look of wisdom and staunchness, a calm light of tenderness and goodness of heart; withal, an expression that seemed to tell of suffering, perhaps, or mystery, or shrinking from a dread. Shrinking? Yes; that is the word. It fits the man; his manner, his look, his great reticence.

Rab filled his pipe and lit it; sipped from the tumbler that Frank had set on the mantelshelf, and, stretching his feet towards the fire, writhed himself comfortably into his chair. Already the warmth had reached his bones; on his cheek lay a shallow flush; slowly he turned and looked at Marian, sitting back by her work-basket, and at Frank standing by the lamp trying to cajole a piece of string down the stem of his pipe.

"Ay," he said, softly to himself; then smiled, rubbed his hands together and turned once more to his contemplation of the fire.

Presently, Frank pulled up a chair, cocked his feet upon the mantelpiece, and through a cloud of smoke, began to talk. He was very lively, was Frank; full of spirits, ideas. His tongue galloped; his laugh rang merry. Sometimes he slapped his knee; now leant over to shake Rab by the collar; now brought down his feet with a clatter and turned to flash a joke at Marian, sitting back over her needlework. He talked of politics, lightly, sneeringly; of his neighbours, scathingly, superciliously; of his friends, particularly his literary friends, with critical freedom; of books, editors, reviews, with a light play of glib knowledge; of his own book, with a scoffing note of devil-me-care. The critics, indeed: oh, confound their ignorance. The public, indeed: oh, a plague on its shallowness. Popularity, forsooth: oh, that be hanged. What of success, when success meant pandering to the Philistines; what of fame with its gilded trumpet; to the deuce with popularity, so be it that the few who knew were constant. And Frank slapped his leg again; and Marian smiled

over her needle; and Rab grunted as he filled a fresh pipe, nor felt himself ready with a word.

But seldom indeed had Rab a word ready; with Frank on the floor seldom was a word necessary. He liked to hear the chatter, the laughter; his pipe went soothingly; the fire was comforting, the whisky grateful; he felt happy, did Rab, well at his ease. what more might mortal want? Frank meant well and hurt little. He liked the boy, his gabble and gaiety, his open heart and hand. He had hopes of him, with time, experience, wisdom. He was glad to see him so happy in his home. It was good to see Frank flashing round to his wife; that smile of Marian's pleased him vastly. They were a well-matched pair, God bless them! Might he never see care darken their faces. And might they always have room for battered old Rab, a light for his pipe, a word and a smile, a chair by the fire. Theirs was his one place of refuge, his one haven from the troubled waters of journalistic drudgery: might the gods of their hearth be ever watchful and kindly. Ay, ay, thought Rab; ay, ay.

So Frank chattered, and Rab pondered; and Marian, bending over her needle, gave ear and thought to them both. She liked to see them together, to hear them talk; always she was quite content to give them her silent companionship. She was not clever, she felt; she was but a woman, with a woman's range and outlook; admiration and sympathy were all she could give, but willingly she gave her all and was satisfied. She liked Rab. She wished, sometimes, he would come oftener. He did Frank good; steadied, controlled him. Often had she wondered

at their friendship. They were so utterly unlike. Rab was so silent, grave; time and again had she known him say fewer words through an evening than flowed from Frank inside five minutes. Never had she seen him animated; rarely other than shy and soberly reserved. What was the secret of his influence? And what the secret of himself? He was so mysterious in his ways; sometimes he looked haunted. And never would he either hint or speak. Often Frank twitted him, with a love affair, an uneasy conscience; and always Rab smiled, sent up a cloud of smoke and let his tongue lie dumb. He was a complete mystery. No one knew where he lived; not even Frank, his one and long-time friend. No one knew how he took his leisure. He never spoke of himself, his friends or relatives, his work or ambitions. Why was it? thought Marian, and round the lamp-shade glanced at his great head and sprawling hands. Ah, why indeed, she thought; and knew that a better answer she might not have. Perhaps it was as well, she added. Why trouble? Nothing could alter him in their eyes. He was just Rab; might he be always just Rab.

How very lively Frank was. Seldom had she seen him quite like that. All life he was and gay foolishness. Was it quite natural? Only a little while ago he had been quite different. Had Rab not come just when he did there might have been a scene. She had seen Frank look like that before. Ah, yes. Was it her fault or his? Hers, she feared. She was hard with the dear fellow; she got cold, at times, obstinate. Her heart seemed to get frozen. Absurd things, wicked things, came to her mind now and

then ; and instead of driving them away she harboured them. Oh, she must guard herself. Still, she had said nothing that night to make Frank angry. Only a question or two about the characters in his story. Were they real? she had asked. Had he met people like them—like Nancy, for instance—when he was in Ireland? Surely there was no harm in saying that? Why had Frank grown irritable? Was there anything he had not told her? Hark! Was that the boy? Hastily Marian rose; turned, and there in the doorway stood her old father and mother.

“Why, Dad,” cried she. “And Mother! You old dears, to come like this.” She crossed and kissed them. Rab rose. Frank came bustling over. At once the room was filled with chatter, greetings, laughter; soon fell quiet again as the door closed upon Marian and her mother and the three men were left to themselves.

Knowing and dreading the untidy ways which usually ran in the study, old Dent had left overcoat and hat in the hall; and now stood between Frank and Rab, warming his hands at the fire. He was a man of about sixty-five, short and somewhat portly, wearing a braided frock-coat, grey trousers and an old-time fancy waistcoat. He stood very erect, coat tightly buttoned, black tie neatly adjusted, studs trim and flashing, his feet turned outwards at an elegant angle. Not one of his white hairs was awry; his whiskers were perfection; the parting that ran from nape to crown was mathematical in its correctness. He had a large nose, a receding forehead, scanty eyebrows; a face on which benevolence, good

health, respectability, had writ their tokens large. From top to toe he looked the pink of cleanliness, decency; a fine specimen of your average, middle-class Englishman, insular, it might be, and not intellectually endowed, yet standing upright in his square-toed shoes.

For a while he stood warming his hands and uttering this truism and that, about the weather, the stalest politics, the latest news; then turned, tucked hands under coat-tails and swayed forward on his toes.

"Well, Frank, my boy," said he, and strove to hide the twinkle in his eyes; "what's your opinion, now, of things in general?"

Frank had been confidently awaiting that. It was the Dad's great joke; one that had seen service on a thousand hearthrugs.

He laughed, winked across at Rab; answered the Dad as always, in the like case, he had answered, by offering him pipe and tobacco.

"Smoke, Dad," said he. "Do now. Come, be sociable."

The Dad chuckled and looked slyly at Frank.

"Ah, you rascal," said he, and repeated himself for the thousandth time. "You murderin' villain; an' is it carried home on a stretcher you'd have me." He turned to Rab and began fumbling in his tail pocket. "You know, Mr. Lindsay," he went on, with that air of jauntiness which, in his moments of humour, he usually affected, "these young rascals of Irishmen want careful watching. Oh, they're murderin' thieves. But I know them; I'm awake to their tricks," said he, and drew forth: first, a small packet of tobacco neatly folded in brown paper; then, a piece

of tissue paper carefully doubled into squares ; lastly, a pair of scissors in a case, and a box of matches. Slowly he turned about ; with precision arranged his treasures on the mantelshelf ; then with the scissors began fashioning a cigarette paper. Rab stood peering down at him ; striving hard to keep back laughter, Frank stood biting his pipe stem and trying to catch Rab's eye.

"There," said the Dad, and spread his square of paper on the match box. "There," said he again, and upon the paper laid a narrow line of tobacco. "Now," said he, and fell to rolling the cigarette between his fingers. "Dash !" said he, as his fingers slipped. "Dim !" said he, as the tobacco spun out at each end, leaving a lump in the middle. "Ah !" he exclaimed, and cautiously ran his tongue along the edge of the paper ; and, "There !" cried he, when at last his cigarette was achieved and lay ragged and shapeless upon the mantelshelf. Smiling grimly, Rab turned away ; Frank laughed out and smote old Dent on the back.

"Good old Dad," cried he. "Splendid, my boy."

"Ah yes," said the Dad. "I know you, Frank, you rascal ; I know you." Carefully he struck a match, lit his cigarette ; then, puffing at it with quick short puffs, as though he were afraid of it, turned once more and faced the room.

Presently he fell a-talking, of this trifle and of that, of his own little affairs, and of those that stirred the dust in the little world around him. He spoke pompously, using big words and mispronouncing them not infrequently. Sometimes he would fain be humorous ; now he was jauntily frivolous ; always he was

shallow, aggressively obvious. Within ten minutes he had affirmed that free-trade was ruining England; that popular education was a mistake; that coals were absurdly dear, and that baldness was hereditary in the Dent family. His opinions were antiquated. He believed in the past, the good old days of his youth, the time when apples were six a penny, and Dulwich was a garden of Eden, and boys were boys, and girls girls, and neither spoilt by the Board Schools. Mentally he had not budged for forty years; in knowledge and experience he was a young man grown old, a fossil embedded in the dear hills of long ago. In literature he admired Dickens, Shakespeare (whom he never read), and the evening paper. In art he was fond of battle-pieces, studies in the pathetic, colour broad and garish. Give him music that set his heels drumming, ballads that wailed and snivelled, and he was happy. He was easily pleased; fond of his home; unselfish, good-tempered; and for the rest, spoke never an evil word of anyone. In all his life, by word or deed, he had never wronged a soul. His record was clean before God and man. Yet, in face of these benevolences, perhaps indeed because of them, there at sixty-five stood Richard Dent, still at the foot of the ladder, his face turned hopefully upwards, ever striving, ever failing, doomed for aye to see others climbing and himself left trampling the dust, a commercial drudge, a stranded, grey-headed junior.

How well it is that God in his mercy leaves to men their hopes and their delusions.

So, for a while, the Dad, with his back to the fire, stood airing the trifles of his wisdom; at last stepped from the hearthrug and, much to Frank's amuse-

ment, if quite in happening with his expectation, began tidying the room. "Dear, dear," he murmured, and set the chairs, exactly square and to an inch equally divided, along the walls. "What children," said he, and cleared the floor of its litter; "what careless children." "Tut-tut," he repeated over and over as he stood striving for order in the chaos of Marian's work basket. "Dim!" cried he as a needle point found his finger. "Bust!" he muttered and knelt rubbing his crown, still sore from its contact with the edge of the table. And he fussed and fidgeted, and dusted, and tidied, and rubbed his nose, and scratched his ear, and lit and relit his cigarette, and creaked about on his toes, and muttered and mumbled: and back on the hearthrug, Frank Barry, with that observant eye of his ever on the swoop, stood laughing and nudging Rab, in his mind's eye beholding the Dad parade as one Mr. Roy through the pages of a certain novel that someday was to be; and Rab Lindsay, his elbow on the mantelshelf and his cheek in his hand, stood gravely following the old man through that campaign with disorder. And seeing him, Frank's eyes were laughingly scornful; but in Rab's shone a light of grave tenderness.

Then back swung the door; in came Marian, and with her the boy Frank, perched high, like the little conqueror he was, in his grandmother's arms. Mercy, the babblement that uprose; the worship that began at the shrine of that pink-robed atomy. A deal now availed all the Dad's campaign; in five minutes was scattered ruthlessly all the order of his hands. Chairs were pulled out, tables shifted. Down sat

the sweet-faced granny, ringlets dancing, eyes shining, her withered hands nestling tenderly in the child's warm softness, her tongue running ceaselessly, her lips dropping honey, adoration, caresses. Such a darling it was. Oh, the sweet. Let the Dad look. Oh, the pride of her life. Ah, but Frank should be proud. Let Frank look, let everybody look and listen. And everybody did look, listen, admire. Here was Marian, a world of love shining in her eyes, an eternity of content on her face. Here was the Dad, down on his knees, cigarette flung to glory, hair ruffled, neck-tie crooked, cheeks puffed out, head wagging solemnly, his face puckered into the foolishness of grimaces. Here was Frank, his breast big with the glory of fatherhood, clapping his hands, booing, capering, striving his hardest for the reward of a smile from his solemn-eyed hopeful. Here was Rab— But no! Surely that melancholy jester, now blaring fanfares on a tin trumpet, now beating a tattoo with a paper-knife on the table, surely that is not Rab Lindsay? Well, well, one says and gasps; well, well!

But even infantile patience may be tried unduly (the saying is worthy of the Dad), and babes, like kings, have a surfeit of adoration; and at last young Frank clenched his fists and bawled scorn in the teeth of his admirers. Such consternation; such a rout! Back fell Frank and Rab to their places by the hearthrug; up went the sound of womanly solace; stiffly the Dad rose, dusted his knees, stepped to a shelf and taking down a volume of Macaulay's *England* began to read.

For a while young Frank had the room to himself; then, suddenly, fell quiet and took to playing with

his toes. The women bobbed heads; soon were deep in the mysteries of teething. Frank and Rab found food for talk in this literary doing and in that. Patiently the Dad plodded through a page of Macaulay; then closed the book on his thumb, set a chair in its right place, and came to the fire. His face was pulled solemn; in deep thought he stood for a moment, looking at his boots.

"Yes," said he, "it's magnificent." He sighed, rubbed his nose; looked up. "You know, Mr. Lindsay," he went on, "one of the greatest regrets I have is that I can't find leisure to peruse my books. Quite a lot of them I have—haven't I, Frank?—quite a number of really excellent books; and yet, I assure you, there they stand, day after day, week after week, positively unopened. You see," said the Dad, with a wave of his hand, "I have such a lot to do. Some most important transactions, some most confidential papers receive my consideration. All day long," said the Dad, swelling importantly within his Junior Clerk's broadcloth, "it is Mr. Dent here and Mr. Dent there, till positively I don't know sometimes whether I'm on my head or my heels. Then I have large. . ."

Frank set his back against the mantelpiece and smiled scornfully. The Dad was always the same. A hundred times he had seen him stand just so, legs apart, shoulders thrown back; stand endeavouring to impress people with a sense of his great commercial value and importance: now, here he stood again, for the hundred and first time, just as solemnly important and impracticable, just as childishly eager as ever in his great game of make-believe.

"So you see," the Dad kept on, "what with one thing and another, really my time is fully occupied. And when I get home there's this, that and the other to be done, odd jobs here, and odd jobs there—"

"Yes, Dad," interrupted Frank, with a laugh; "we know all about it. Odd jobs of cleaning your watch chain, inking your umbrella, dusting the furniture, and so on. Oh, we know all about it."

The Dad laughed softly; stroked his whiskers; poked Frank in the ribs, and called him a rascal.

"Well, well," said he; "well, well. At all events, you can see, Mr. Lindsay, that my time for reading is infinitesimal. Now and then I take down a volume and read a page or two; but it's only a page, only a page. Something calls me away; or I fall asleep; or my eyes get tired and—there you are, you see, there you are." Thoughtfully the Dad looked at the fire for a while; then stepped to the bookcase, stood Macaulay's *England* in its place, and coming back drew out a pocket-comb and began combing his whiskers. "However, it won't always be so," he continued; "there's a good time coming. Someday or another I'll have plenty of leisure. They won't always be wanting me at the office. No. Not always. And then——"

The Dad paused; set his lips; stood as if gazing out across the backs of the years into the glorious depths of that good time. Frank stood smiling at the lamp. Rab shifted his elbow from the mantel-piece and straightened his back.

"Yes, Mr. Dent," said he. "And then?"

"Then," said the Dad, "why, then I'll start and peruse all my books right through. All of them.

Right through. I'll not miss a word. Not one. I'll have all day long. When I'm tired of gardening, and the odd jobs are done, then I'll sit down beneath the pear tree. . . . "

Frank pulled out his pipe. Oh, Dad, Dad, thought he; you poor old dreamer. Some day, always some day; always a good time coming; always deluding yourself and putting off, putting off. So it had ever been; so it would ever be.

"Ah, yes, Dad," said he; "some day you'll have time enough. Only a few years more and that great leisure time will come surely. It's bound to come."

The Dad turned uneasily; but Rab caught him by the arm.

"Don't," said Rab. "Don't mind, Mr. Dent. I quite agree with you. Keep on thinking as you do. Never mind the books, just now. They're little good, believe me. But when the time comes—well," said Rab, with a smile, "you'll let me come, won't you, and join you under the pear tree? You'll let me sit in the garden, won't you, and read all day long?"

"Why, of course," answered the Dad; "why, certainly, Mr. Lindsay."

"Right. And, man, won't we have times, great times!"

Rab paused, stood blinking down at the fire. The Dad looked curiously at him; essayed to speak; shifted his feet and dropped his eyes. Frank laughed, softly and ironically; then, for the second time that night, left the hearthrug, and crossed to answer a knock at the study door.

CHAPTER III.

It was Polly, the house-servant, with word for Mr. Frank that a woman was waiting in the dining-room to see him. She had just come; had walked in unasked, saying that Mr. Barry knew her.

Frank stepped out upon the landing and pulled the door close behind him.

"Didn't she give her name, Polly?" he asked. "Don't you know her? What does she want, then?"

Polly couldn't say; had not asked; thought that perhaps the woman had come on business.

Frank considered.

"You're sure it isn't Mrs. Barry she wants?" he asked. "No. Then tell her, please——" He paused. "No. Tell her I'll be down in a moment, Polly." Frank opened the study door. "Some one to see me down-stairs, my dear," he said to Marian. "Don't know who it is; but I'll tell you presently. Excuse me, everybody," he went on, with a wave of his hand. "I'll not be long."

Frank closed the study door; went along the passage and down the stairs. Who is it? he kept wondering. Somehow, he felt nervous, apprehensive. Beneath the hall lamp, he stopped and pulled out his watch. Past nine o'clock; nearly supper-time. A woman; a nameless woman? Slowly he walked to the dining-room door; there stopped again, with his

hand on the knob; then quickly turned the handle and went in.

The gas was turned high; the table laid for supper. Facing the door a small fire burnt brightly; and by it, on the edge of a chair, sat a woman in a black bonnet and shawl. Frank crossed; the woman turned; Frank stopped. It was Sarah Butler.

There came to Frank Barry, as he stood there dumfounded between the table and the sideboard, a vivid memory of something he had seen nearly three years before—a cottage wall, a window below the thatch, a face above the sill, a sneering face set round with a frilled night-cap; and with the memory came to him also a numb feeling of dismay. Sarah Butler? Nan's mother? Why had she come? He plucked at his collar-band; moved a step; halted, and stood looking at the fire. Sarah rose.

"Good-evenin', Mr. Barry," said she. "I hope I'm seein' ye well?"

It was the old voice, the old shrill voice; and to Frank's ears it came like an echo from the buried past. He turned; quickly put out his hand, as quickly withdrew it, and laid it on the back of a chair.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Butler," he answered. "Good-evening." He paused; rubbed his hand backwards and forwards along the chair-back; looked round. "Won't you sit down?" said he.

Behind her hand Sarah coughed; drew out a rag of pocket-handkerchief, wiped her lips, and once more seated herself on the edge of a chair. Her eyes shifted quickly here and there; presently fixed themselves on Frank's face.

"Ye didn't expect to see——" Sarah stopped; wiped her lips. "It'll be hard weather, I'm thinkin', for the time o' year," said she.

"Yes," answered Frank. He turned a chair; sat down, set his elbow on the table and his cheek on his hand. "Yes," he said; "yes, indeed."

Sarah coughed again; ran a finger between chin and bonnet string; shifted back an inch in her chair.

"Ye didn't expect to see me here, Mr. Barry," she ventured, part asserting, part questioning. Frank looked at her.

"No," he said. "Frankly, I did not."

"Ay. Just so. It'll be a good while since we seen other last, Mr. Barry," Sarah went on after a pause. Frank nodded. "A long time it is; three years a'most. Ay, nearly three years." Sarah sighed. "An' sure a power can happen in three years; ay, a power."

Still Frank sat silent. Why had she come? he kept thinking. How did she find out? He turned his eyes; met Sarah's full; hastily looked away.

"Yes. Oh, yes. How—how's John, Mrs. Butler?"

"John? Aw, John's the best, so he is—what's left of him. An' I'm rightly meself, Mr. Barry," Sarah volunteered. "An'—yis, Nan's as well as ye could expect, so she is; jist as well."

Frank reddened; dived for the poker, and began stirring the fire. Might the devil take the woman, he thought.

"Naw, we can't complain, any of us," Sarah kept on, "as far as the health goes. That stands us rightly, thank God; rightly. But for the rest——"

Sarah shook her head. "Aw, sure London's an ojus cruel place on the poor—ojus cruel—ojus cruel."

Frank laid down the poker; leant back in his chair and fell to twisting his watch-chain round a finger. He was recovering his balance, he felt; losing that strange feeling of dismay.

"Yes? I agree with you, Mrs. Butler. And how long have you been in London?" he asked, without raising his eyes.

"Six months," was Sarah's quick response; "six whole months come a fortnight on Wednesday. We left Inishrath the week after Hollentide; an' now here we are in—dear Lord, dear Lord;" Sarah moaned and clapped her hands on her knees; "the time it is! Six whole months. An' it only like yisterday—only like yisterday. Sure I mind it as well as well. I can see it all as plain as plain. I mind ivery stone in the wall; ivery rut in the lane; ivery—Aw, an' there's the neighbours gathered to bid us good-bye; cryin', the cratures, an' shoutin', an' crowdin' to grip the hands of us. An' there's ourselves—John, an' meself, an' Nan—an' there's the ould house, the ould hill, the ould hedges an' ditches; an' we're goin', goin', goin' for iver, an' sure—Aw, sure, I thought me heart'd burst that day."

There were tears in Sarah's eyes, tears in her voice; but a pitiable figure she made there in that cosy room, her shoulders drooping, her withered face turned to the fire, her battered hands spread on her knees. And there sat Frank, dubiously eyeing her, pitying her a little, disliking her a great deal, fearing her most of all.

"But what am I talkin' about?" Sarah went on,

and drew her hand across her eyes. "Sure, it's bleatherin' I am; an' 'tisin't to you, Mr. Barry, I'd be sayin' such things. Sure it's nothin' to you. Nothin' at all."

Frank leant towards her.

"But it is something to me, Mrs. Butler," he said. "Surely you can't think I have forgotten my old Inishrath friends?" Sarah turned and looked at him, looked straight and searchingly. "Tell me more," Frank continued. "How did it come that you had to leave Inishrath?"

"Eh?" said Sarah. "What? Ye niver heard? Ould Hugh didn't tell ye?"

"No," answered Frank. "I never heard a word. Tell me how it was, Mrs. Butler."

Sarah looked at the fire; for a moment sat wiping her lips; then loosened her shawl and flung it back from her throat.

"Aw yis," said she, with a cheerless laugh. "How it was, indeed. Sure that's not hard to tell ye. Flung out we were, pitched out, neck and crop, the dure slammed in our back an' to glory wi' us. That's how it was, Mr. Barry. That's how they treated us—may the devil burn their bones! That's how they treated John after his fifty years o' slavery, an' him hardly done moanin' over his ould father's grave. Landlords—gentlemen—Christians! The devils—aw, the devils!"

Sarah paused. Her hands were clenched, on her face was a wolfish fierceness. No need had Frank to question her further. The inevitable had come. Nemesis had overtaken John in the midst of his foolishness.

"So old John's dead," he said, in a while. "Paid the penalty at last?"

"Ay, he's dead. God help him!" answered Sarah. "An' well for him it is; well for him. God knows I envy him at times. If it wasn't for Nan an' John; if it wasn't for them I'd—I'd—" Sarah stopped and set her lips. "But no matter," she said; "no matter."

Frank peered across at Sarah. Evidently things were not going well with her. She had changed woefully. This was not the old Sarah, thought Frank Barry, the fresh, decent woman who, three years before, he had seen sitting mistress and tyrant by the Inishrath hearthstone. In every way she was changed, and for the worse. Her old-time manner of shrewish independence, of outspoken acerbity had gone; now she was obsequious, was furtive and hesitating. Moreover, she looked worn, shabby. Her shawl was rusty; grown old, you might say, in the service of the pawnshop. Her bonnet, a dingy thing of faded crape and stringy ribbons, might have been picked from a barrow in Lambeth Walk. Her dress was bedraggled and mud-splattered. She looked, Frank thought, like any other of the weary drudges who wear out miserable lives in the Walworth slums. She had put off the country, its decency and rude health, and taken on the town, its sordidness and ill-favour. London had gripped her with its grimy clutch. Its trail was over her. She had joined the ranks of the great Submerged. And all within six months! And what of John, big, useless John? And what of Nan, sweet, simple Nan? Quickly, Frank turned again to Sarah.

"And so," he said; "so you left Ireland and came to London?"

"Ay. We did."

"And you like it, Mrs. Butler?"

Sarah turned.

"Like it? Like London?" Sarah paused; looked at the fire. "Well," she went on, "I dunno. I do, an' I don't; I don't, an' I do. If one had enough to ate, an' drink, an'—an'— No matter about that. Aw, it's a quare place is London, a powerful, strange place. It killed me a'most, the first week of it. I thought the heart 'd break in me for thinkin' of the ould days—the ould days. Ah, 'twas ojus at first. But sure one got used to it after a while. Ay. An' now— Well, sometimes I want to get away, to get back; an' other times I don't; an' times I think that mebbe it's all for the best. An' sure what's the use o' groanin'? Isn't it all the same? Wasn't it the poorhouse yonder; an' isn't it that here, or as bad; an' isn't it only a few more years o' strugglin' anyway? Aw yis." Sarah sighed; shook her head. "Aw yis, indeed."

There fell a little while of silence, with Frank looking thoughtfully at his hands and Sarah pondering the fire; then said Frank:

"And John, how is he, Mrs. Butler? How does he like London?"

"Aw, John. John? Sure he's well enough. Yis." Sarah straightened her back; plucked at her shawl and turned to Frank. "'Twas about him I came to ye, Mr. Barry, to see if ye could do anything. He's—he's—Och, he's unfortunate. It's God's pity of him. He's tramped his feet off to get work; he's

done iverything—iverything; an' it's all no use. He got a job one time—an' lost it. He was promised another—an' niver got it. Some say he's too ould; others that he's no character; the rest give out that they don't want Irishmen, an' don't want this an' don't want that. He's willin' enough—och, he is; but sure that's no good, no good at all. He doesn't get a day's work in a week; he hasn't earnt what'd pay the rent all the winter. An' it's hard on us, so it is. Nan does her best. An' I do what I can at the charin'. But sure—Aw, it's not enough, not near enough. An' it's at work John ought to be—hard at work all day long. He's bein' tempted. There's the drink, an' there's the clubs, an' there's—Aw, no matter, no matter. Sure ye can guess how it is, Mr. Barry," said Sarah; "ye can guess how it is."

"Yes," answered Frank, with a nod. "I can guess quite well."

"So," Sarah went on in that mournful, sighing tone which now seemed habitual with her, "when John found out where ye were livin'—"

Frank raised a hand.

"One moment, Mrs. Butler," said he. "But would you just mind telling me how John did find out?"

"Aw *that*. Sure I forgot. Why, didn't he come across a paper in the—in a place he goes to, wi' a letter o' yours in it about some book or another? An' he reads it, an' sees your name an' address, an'—"

"Thank you." Frank sank back in his chair. "I understand."

"Well, when John sees that, home he comes, an' tells me an' Nan, an' swears he'll go an' see ye, an'

talks an' talks. Ah, ye know John. An' Nan says he mustn't go; an' I'm not over keen on it; but John talks an' talks, an' at last he persuades me to come meself an' have a word wi' ye. . . ."

Again Frank raised his hand.

"Easy, Mrs. Butler; easy. What's this about John having to persuade you? And why, in any case, did not John come himself, or come with you?"

Slowly Sarah turned away her face; slowly made answer.

"Ah, I was loth to come," said she, "because—It was Nan," said Sarah. "It was Nan. An' John couldn't come because—because his clothes—"

Hurriedly Frank stooped.

"Yes, yes. I know. Well," said Frank, as he stirred the fire, "tell me the rest."

"It's nothin'," said Sarah. "It's just this. Says John to me: 'Away wi' ye, Sarah, to Mr. Frank,' says he, 'an' tell him about things; an' ax him if he could do a poor divil a good turn,' says he; 'an' ax him if he knows anyone that'd give me an odd job.' Mr. Frank," said Sarah, turning in her chair; "och, d'ye think ye know anyone?"

For a while Frank sat pondering; then looked at Sarah and shook his head.

"I'm afraid not," said he.

"Aw," sighed Sarah.

"You see," Frank went on, "I know so few people, and I don't know one, not one, who would be likely to help John. I wish to Heaven I did. I'd do anything to help my old friend; but—" Again Frank shook his head.

"Aw, yis," sighed Sarah. "Aw, yis."

"But perhaps there's something else I could do, Mrs. Butler. Is there, do you think? Did John suggest anything else?"

"Ah, he did," sighed Sarah. "He did. He said that mebbe you'd write a letter for him—say a word for him—give him a bit of a character."

"Write," cried Frank. "I'll write a score. Poor old John! Tell him, Mrs. Butler, how much I feel for him, and how sorry I am that I can't do more. But tell him, please, that what I can I'll do, and do it willingly. You'll tell him that, won't you?"

"Ah, I will—I will."

"Ask him to come and see me. Say I'm at home nearly always. Tell him—Could I do anything else?" said Frank, and fell to rattling the silver in his pocket.

The blood flushed along the hardness of Sarah's wrinkles.

"We're obliged to ye, Mr. Barry," said she. "But it wasn't for that I'd be comin' to ye."

"No?" said Frank. "Well, is there anything else, then? Oh, yes; there's that letter. Tell John, I'll write to him at once. But stay." Frank pulled out his pocket-book. "I haven't your address. What shall I put down, Mrs. Butler?"

Sarah hesitated; haltingly gave an address in East Street, Walworth. Frank's brows went up.

"Oh," said he. "*There!*" And at the word Sarah rose.

"Yes, Mr. Barry," said she. Her voice had the the old Inishrath ring. "It's there. I'm thinkin' it's not to see John Butler you'll be comin' now, God help him. Aw, no." Frank began a stammering

apology. "Ah, ye needn't," Sarah kept on, with a motion of her hand. "Ye needn't bother. I know all about it." She ran her eye over the supper-table. "It's the way o' the world that some people get more than they deserve an' others less; but, thank God, it takes a power to kill the pride in the worst of us. Ay, it does. That's always left to us even if it's to pig-styes we come." She moved towards the door, going erect and stiffly; all at once turned. "Tell me, Mr. Barry," she asked, her eyes hard and glittering, "is it married you'll be?"

Frank flinched. Ah, thought he, it has come at last! Steadily he looked at Sarah.

"Why do you ask, Mrs. Butler?"

"Because — D'ye mind what happened three years ago?"

"Yes."

"Then ye know why I asked. Are ye? I say again."

The word Yes was on Frank's tongue; when, in a flash, came thought of Marian. Suppose the woman made a scene, brought Marian down, in her ruthlessness told everything? He hooked his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets; cocked his head; smilingly looked Sarah in the eyes.

"Tell me," said he. "Do I look like a married man?"

Narrowly Sarah eyed him.

"No," she answered. "Ye don't."

"I look much the same as I did three years ago, don't I, Mrs. Butler?"

"Ay. About that."

"Then we'll let that stand for an answer," said

Frank Barry, and turning to the sideboard took out a wine bottle and two glasses. "And now we'll drink each other's health in good old Irish fashion." He filled the glasses, gave one to Sarah and raised the other. "Here's your health, Mrs. Butler," said he, "and the health of all your care. Good-luck to you!"

Sarah's face softened; a smile crept along her lips.

"I'm obliged to ye, Mr. Barry," said she. "An' the same to you." Slowly she raised her glass; drained it in a mouthful; sighed and gathered her shawl about her throat. "Ah, that's warmin'," said she, and followed Frank into the hall. On the steps she turned and held out her hand. "Good-night to ye, Mr. Barry, an' you'll not be thinkin' too hard o' what I said to ye? I've a proud strain in me, an' I'm easily vexed, an' —"

"Oh, that's all right." Frank laughed and took Sarah's hand. "Good-night to you, Mrs. Butler; and tell John I'll write that letter to-morrow, and one of these days I'll hope to see him. Remember me very kindly to him, won't you?"

"Ah, I will, Mr. Barry." Sarah turned away. "I will. Good-night to ye."

"Good-night, Mrs. Butler."

CHAPTER IV.

"FRANK."

"Yes Yes, dear."

"I wish you'd tell me more about that poor woman, that Mrs. Malarky. Somehow, I can't help thinking of her."

Frank Barry lowered his newspaper, and across the breakfast-table glanced at his wife. He had been waiting, with a measure of confidence, for her to say something like that. He had not hoped that the account of Sarah Butler (under the name of Mrs. Malarky) and of her visit, which, the night before, he had given at supper-time would entirely satisfy Marian. The account had been clever, vivid; accurately he had described Sarah, her forlornness and deterioration; in a few words had dismissed Inish-rath, in a great many given Sarah's story of her experiences in London; fully, brilliantly he had told all he thought fit to tell, not once faltering, or lying, not once saying a word that might awake suspicion in Marian's mind. Yet, all the time of the telling, and afterwards as he sat smoking with Rab, and again as he lay staring at the ceiling, suspicion told him that, despite all his care and cleverness, he had not made the story satisfying for Marian. He felt sure he had not. She was so hard to satisfy; so little ready to take his word at a gulp and have done with

it. Always some question, some suspicion wherewith to ply him.

He moved his cup and saucer, shifted to face the fire, noisily turned a sheet of his newspaper.

"More?" said he. "My dear, what more can I tell you? Surely to goodness I told you enough last night. Would you have me invent things?"

Marian lifted young Frank out of his chair, placed him on her knee and gave him a toy.

"Oh, I don't know," she answered, a note of surprise at Frank's petulance sounding in her voice. "I merely wished to hear a little more about her. I thought—Oh, it doesn't matter at all."

Frank laid his newspaper across his knees.

"Now, now, Marian," he said, sharply. "Please don't talk like that. You know very well it does matter. Come; what is it you want to know?"

"It's nothing, Frank." Marian looked up. "Well, I thought perhaps you had seen more of her than you said, whilst you were in Ireland."

Ah, thought Frank. It was quite what he expected.

"Yes?" said he. "Well, I did see something of the woman—went once or twice to have a talk with James the husband—heard a little now and then about them. You see, they were neighbours of uncle Hugh's; and life used to be pretty dull. I was glad occasionally to go anywhere for a change. But—Well, really, Marian, they have been little in my mind these last three years. I have had other things, and better things, to think about."

Marian began playing with young Frank's curls.

"I know, Frank," she said; "of course I know.

It wasn't that. Were they respectable people; really deserving people?"

"Most respectable, Marian; and in their way deserving. They were not faultless, of course. I've told you about that. But, taken altogether, they were as good as the rest—perhaps a little better."

"And you really think they are in a bad way now?"

"Think? I'm sure of it. My dear, if you had but seen the woman three years ago—and seen her last night. Never have I seen a sorrier change in anyone. She's ten years older and twenty years worse."

"Poor soul," said Marian; "poor body. Frank, do you think I could help her, give her work, or recommend her anywhere?"

Frank squirmed in his chair.

"No," said he. "I don't think so. Work? Why, what work have you, Marian? Remember she's only a—washerwoman."

"But I want a woman to do rough work."

"Oh, she wouldn't do at all, Marian." Frank waved his hand emphatically. "I wouldn't have her in the house. I wouldn't wear a shirt she had washed. Pooh," cried Frank, taking up his paper. "The notion's absurd."

"Yes?" said Marian; then paused for a moment. "But, Frank, surely I could do something? I feel so much for the poor soul. It's so terrible to know she's in such poverty—and her husband wanting work—and the weather so cold. Don't you think, Frank, I might go to see her and take her some little things?"

Frank shot from his chair; twisted round before the fire.

"Go to see her?" He bent his brows. "Go to see her! Why, good heavens, Marian, what are you thinking of? Go to see a woman like that—a mere charwoman—a washerwoman! But surely, my dear, surely you're not serious?"

"Certainly, Frank. Why not? Is there anything very dreadful in my suggestion? And if she is a washerwoman, or anything else, would you have that influence me in the least?"

"Oh, nonsense, Marian; nonsense." Frank tossed his head. "You know it isn't *that*. Why, think of it; think of you in East Street. Going down there! I won't hear of such a thing; I can't imagine how you came to think of it."

Marian did not answer. She rested her elbow on the table, put her chin in her hand and sat staring at the pattern on the cosey. Frank glanced at his paper; lowered it and spread a hand.

"Why, you might be insulted, robbed. It's a terrible place. You might bring home the smallpox. The cads would hustle you. And do you think the woman would thank you for surprising her in her poverty? Do you? Answer me, Marian."

"I don't know, Frank."

"Well, I'm sure she wouldn't. Oh, but why talk. I won't have it. Other men may think so little of their wives as to let them go slumming; but I don't. I won't have it at all. You hear me, Marian."

"Yes, Frank."

There was a pause. Marian sat studying the cosey. Young Frank was cooing, and laughing at his

fingers. Again Frank raised his paper ; again lowered it.

"I can't think how you came by such a notion, Marian," he went on. "Positively, I can't. Come, Marian; you mustn't treat me in this way. Look up, I say, and answer me."

Marian looked up, with glowing eyes.

"I have nothing to answer, Frank," she said, coldly and deliberately. "Or say."

"Oh," said Frank, with a shrug. "I see. I tell you what I think is right—and you treat me in this way, with hard looks and bitter answers. I see. Perhaps you'll tell me next that I'm a fool for my pains? Eh? Say it if you like, you know."

Marian sat young Frank on her arm and rose.

"No, Frank," she answered; "I have no wish to say even that. I have no desire to say anything." She moved towards the door; stopped and wheeled round. "What have I done," she cried, "that you should say such things to me? What have I done? If you objected to what I said couldn't you have said so like a gentleman. Oh, it's cruel," cried Marian, turning to the door; "cruel!"

"Like a gentleman," repeated Frank; then dropped his newspaper on the hearthrug, hastily crossed and took Marian by the arm. "No, no, Marian," he said. "You mustn't go like that. Come back, my dear. No, no; don't go, I beg of you." Marian stood tapping her foot on the floor. "Come back," Frank pleaded. "Do, Marian. I was a brute. Oh, I don't know what to say. But do forgive me, Marian."

"Forgive you, Frank? Yes. And what's the

good of that? Have I not done so before? May I not have to do so again—and again—and again?”

“I know, Marian. But just this time, my dear? Look; I’m truly sorry. Give me another chance, old girl; just another?”

Then Marian turned; her face softening, her eyes misty.

“Of course, Frank,” said she; “of course. But tell me, dear, is anything worrying you?”

Frank shook his head.

“No, Marian. Nothing.”

“Then why is it you’re so irritable this morning, so little yourself?”

Again Frank shook his head.

“I don’t know,” he answered; then turned and looked down upon a litter of papers that strewed the end of his table. “Yes, I do. There’s why. Read those press cuttings and see if they wouldn’t make an angel irritable. Look at that manuscript, grown hoary in its vain appeals at Editorial doors. Then, there’s a publisher’s letter, a few little bills, a stab here, a prick there—oh, a glorious display,” cried Frank in his bitterness, so real in its way, yet just then so utterly false. “And the best of it is that there’s every hope of more to follow. Well, well; no matter.” He pulled out his pipe. “There’s no use worrying; not a bit. It’ll be all the same, some day,” said Frank, with a laugh and a toss of his head; “all the same.”

“Ah, yes,” sighed Marian, “so it will.” And there, for the present, so far as Marian was concerned, this matter of the breakfast-table ended.

Frank finished his pipe and his paper; sat

awhile in the troubled shallows of thought before the fire; then jumped up, gathered his litter from the table, ran up-stairs to the study, and sat down to work. But his mood was not kindly that morning. His pen was obdurate. When ideas came, words held aloof; when words came tripping, the idea faded at their feet. Thought seemed frozen. The house was full of clatter; the child cried and fretted; outside a dog kept yelping and a cock crowing. He flung back his chair, fell to pacing up and down, hands writhing behind him, chin on his breast. It was infernal, he kept repeating to himself. He had so much to do; time was pressing hard. He tried again; failed; rose and threw his pen upon the carpet. "Oh, confound the thing," he cried. "And confound the woman!" he cried again; and there laid naked the writhing maggot of his discontent. The thing that ailed him was not unkindly moods, or worrying sounds, but just thought of that woman, one Sarah Butler.

Think, thought Frank Barry, stretching a tragic arm towards the book-case, think of the pickle he was in; the past there jogging his elbow, the future staring at him with ominous eyes, himself standing in his own study, a liar and a hypocrite. Yes, a liar. Last night he had lied; an hour ago he had lied; an hour hence he might lie again. Oh, confound the woman! Ah, why had fate dealt so cruelly with him, thus brought the past knocking at his door? He had fancied it dead and buried. He wanted only to be happy with Marian, to make amends for his weakness by caring for her all he could; and now here was something, which, did Marian know of it, would, he knew

quite well, bring the palace of his happiness crumbling about his ears. That night of the choosing three years ago; that other night, the last of his Irish holiday; suppose Marian to hear of what had happened then—and then? And suppose Sarah Butler in charge of the story, magnifying, hinting darkly, paying off old scores? What an hour that would be for Sarah, what an hour for Marian! And for himself? Well he knew how Marian would look at things; how hard she would be; how silently she would listen to his explanations, her face remorselessly to the bare facts. But she must not know. The woman was gone; he must keep her away. Somehow or other he must keep the past at the threshold. How? By lying and playing the hypocrite? Ah, he hated himself because of that paltry quibbling. Think of him sitting there last night, equivocating, striving his hardest to deck truth in the tawdriest tinsel. Think of that scene at the breakfast-table; Marian there, with the child on her knee, speaking (so now he knew) quite simply and out of pure goodness of heart; himself here, with his back to the fire, answering crookedly and brutally. Ah, he hated himself now for that also. Poor, dear girl! Yet, in God's name, how else could he have answered? He was so afraid. He thought Marian was suspecting him. Oh, confound the woman! Why had he gone down last night to see her? Why had he told Marian anything about her? Why had he not, long ago, as a hundred times he had put it to himself; why had he not, long ago, told everything to Marian? It was not too late now, even now. Suppose he went, there and then, threw himself at Marian's feet, and told her the

whole story? She might listen to him, forgive him for the sake of his weakness, if not of himself. After all, he had done nothing dreadful. Only a little foolish and forgetful he had been. Should he tell Marian? Oh, no, no. He dared not. So often had he told her that never once had he done aught of which he was ashamed; over and over had he whispered that she was the one woman of his life and heart. It would be like striking her in the face to tell her about Nan. No; it was too late now; Marian must not know? But, suppose she heard from some one else, from Sarah, for instance? That would be a pretty bolt from the blue. Oh, confound things! And confound the woman!

But, why worry? All the fretting in the world would not alter things one tittle. And, really, he was carrying on absurdly; putting everything in its worst light, torturing himself about what might never be. Why should Marian ever hear? Why should his palace ever tumble? Let him calm himself, have a pipe, sit down, and get through that work. And that reminded him; he had yet to write John's letter. Poor old John!

So Frank calmed himself; wrote John's letter; then essayed once more the work of the day. But, still his pen stumbled, halted. Phrases were shy; sentences started badly, ran awkwardly, fell lame before long; always was the right word tardy and the wrong obsequious. And, constantly his thoughts kept wandering, racing away to the past, or capering among the events of to-day or yesterday. His hand would stop, the ink fade gradually from the page; there sat Sarah Butler, wiping her lips, loosening the

shawl from her throat, slowly rubbing her gnarled hands up and down her knees. An idea was wanted, he looked up; over in the corner stood Marian, the boy in her arms, her face turned to the door. He was chasing a word; slowly it trailed away, and there between him and the paper was Inishrath, the barren fields running up from the water, the cottage shining through the trees, the green door open, and Nan standing by the threshold; or suddenly night fell, a dog barked, from Nan's garden a dry-lipped man looked up and saw a night-cap bobbing above Nan's window-sill. He flung down his pen, leant back; presently was standing by a dresser, and Ted's arm was outstretched, and Nan was stepping slowly to his side, and John's faceshone in the lamplight. He jumped from his chair, fell to dogging inspiration up and down the room; soon had his face to the floor, and now was romancing to Nan among the heather, now was sitting by her on the thwart and whispering in her ear, now was saying good-bye and behold her sobbing on the pier. Ah, Nan, Nan. See her there, waving her hand and calling good-night. The sweet voice it is. See her now, her white apron flying in the wind, her can in her hand, her eyes turned towards Lismahee pier. And there is the car; there the broad road, leading away, away. Oh, good-bye, Nan; good-bye, my dear. Now she lifts the can, turns, is gone. Oh, good-bye, Nan. . . .

A foot sounded on the landing. Frank Barry stopped, twisted round, and stood watching the door. It opened and in came Marian, a tray in her hand.

"Only a little snack, Frank," said she. "Lunch

will be late to-day, and you made such a poor breakfast. ”

Frank moistened his lips.

“Thank you, Marian. It’s—oh, it’s very good of you, my dear, to think of me like this. ”

“Nonsense, Frank. How have you been getting on this morning? ”

“Badly—dreadfully. I can’t do anything. I haven’t a thought. ”

“Oh, my poor boy. How is it, Frank? ”

“God knows, Marian. I—I can’t make myself out at all. ”

“You’re not worrying about those critics, Frank? ”

“No, Marian. It’s not that—oh, it’s not that. It’s nothing. Just a fit. I’ll get over it. ”

“Can I help you, Frank? The boy’s gone off, and I have plenty of time. ”

“No, Marian. It’s all right, old girl. Don’t worry. Oh, it’s all right. ”

Marian turned to go. With hands clasped behind him and head thrust forward, Frank stood watching her. Suddenly he started forward and caught her by the arm.

“Marian. ”

“Yes, Frank. ”

“Oh, forgive me, Marian. Forgive me, my dear! ”

Marian turned ; her face beaming, her eyes shining softly.

“Forgive you, Frank? Ah, you poor old fellow! So that’s what is worrying you. Why, of course, Frank. Think of letting *that* interfere with your work. Why, my dear, it’s pitying you I’ve been, since breakfast, instead of blaming you. ”

Frank dropped his eyes.

"I know, Marian." He paused. "But it's—it's not for that entirely I want you to forgive me. Not for that—entirely."

"Then for what, Frank? Tell me, dear."

Is was a golden opportunity; the time ripe, Marian gracious, Frank himself on the crest of a fine surge of emotion. The word was at his lips. But he hesitated; and at that, even as he raised his eyes to Marian's, courage withered and the moment of good impulse sped.

"Oh, for everything, Marian," he cried. "For everything. I'm so cruel to you sometimes—and I'm selfish—and I'm not worthy of you, Marian." He dropped on his knees, clutching at his wife's skirt. "Ah, Marian, Marian," he cried again; "do forgive me, dear. Do forgive me."

And Marian, not knowing what he asked, forgave him with tears.

CHAPTER V.

So Frank Barry let slip his opportunity; and thereafter, for a while, the paths of his going were thorny. Work hung on his hands; his nights were troubled, his days weary; ever on his breast, the vipers of self-pity and self-reproach knotted and writhed. Rab came and found him preoccupied; went and left him doleful. The Dad tried joke and platitude; stepped wonderingly at last from the study with a jest dry on his lips. The mother looked anxiously at him beneath the lampshade; then turned to Marian, whispering somewhat of over-work and late hours. Seldom now did he revile the critics; never did he name his book, and if by any chance Marian made mention of it he flushed and turned away. With Marian herself he was often dull, occasionally boisterous; and hardly now dared he look her in the face. Twenty times he resolved to confess all; as often rose from his chair, only to curse his weakness. Once he met her on the stairs, clutched her arm; mumbled a word and went on with confession withering in his throat. He would listen for her foot on the landing, follow her into the bedroom; there waste good courage, and back for the door. He wanted to do right, and feared; scorned his weakness, and fed it; cursed his fate, and beckoned it; withal lived in constant dread of Sarah Butler. Of-

ten, at sound of a knock, he rose and with his heart surging, stood ready for the shrill summons of Sarah's voice. In the streets he shunned women in black shawls as he would a leper. A book grew interesting, on the back of some chance word in came Sarah; he was talking with Marian, a sudden flash and there sat Sarah spreading her bony hands; the Dad was prosing, like a refrain came the words, "Tell me, Mr. Barry, is it married you'll be?" And the more he laughed at his fears the more did his fears possess him.

So for a few weeks it was; then, soothingly on the wings of spring, came Time the Consoler. Things took their true perspective; fears dwindled; life went marching to the old-time tunes. Gradually, Frank Barry crept into his old ways. It was gone, that absurd nightmare time; gone utterly, he was well assured. He had pleasure again in the company of wife and child; found himself thinking less of Sarah and more of John, less of John and more of Nan; found himself at last, one evening, on the pavement of Camberwell New Road, his face towards the Dad's, his thoughts towards the Butlers.

It was early spring, a time of clean heartsome weather. There was a lift in the air, a tone, an impulse; high over the shining roofs the sky hung clear and firm; the long dusty street was full of mellow light, glorifying the dingy houses, lying graciously on the pavements, working strange wonders of colour and shade, of freshness and beauty, on the faces of the passers-by. Here and there the twigs had quickened; from the gardens, sometimes, came the merry clamour of children and the glad evensong of birds;

on every side was the hum of traffic, the surge of life; spring was abroad in grimy London; there were a thousand things to see and be thankful for: yet, steadily Frank Barry kept his face to the stones and pondered as he went. He felt cheerless, a little ashamed. He had just deceived Marian again. He was going to see the Dad. That Marian knew. He meant to go further, even to see the Butlers. That Marian did not know. Was he doing wrong? Frank asked himself. Perhaps so. Was he doing wisely? Perhaps not. Why invoke the past again? Why spoil the present harmony of things? Why take one more step into the drear waters of deceit? Still, he did want to see John Butler, to see Nan; did want, if the thing were possible, to block Sarah's path to his doorway. He meant no harm. He was no child. Every man had his little secrets. Let him rid himself of these petty troubles and turn thought to pleasanter things.

How fine the evening was. It made him think of evenings long ago, evenings falling peacefully on the barren crest of Inishrath. Ah, those wondrous evenings, the beauty and joy of them; the gleam on the water, the riot in the woods, the life throbbing in the fields. There is the ferry, the pier, the lane through the trees, the cottage with its garden patch; there is old John on his crutch, there Sarah in the doorway, and John in the cot, and Nan in the garden. Nan! "*O Death in Life, the days that are no more.*"

Half way down the Leipsic Road, on the right as you come from Walworth, is a row of old-fashioned houses; and in one of these, the neatest, brightest, was the home of the Dents. Frank swung back the

gate ; turned along a path that ran by the tiles of a flower bed ; passed through a green door, down a narrow passage, and came quickly within the sacred precincts of the Dad's garden. There were fruit-trees along the fence ; rose bushes stood against the walls, in the grass-plot ; spring flowers were everywhere ; the walks were trim, the beds a picture : and there, in his garden suit, square-toed shoes and velvet smoking cap, puffing cautiously at a cigarette and proudly viewing the perfection of his hands from the shade of his own pear tree, stood the Dad. He seemed absorbed, lost in the depths of horticultural thought. Cautiously Frank crept over the grass.

" Hello, Dad, you murderin' villain ! "

" Ah, Frank, you rascal ! "

And there was merriment for a while beneath the old pear tree.

Had fate been kind, the Dad had been a gardener. He loved flowers, trees, the open air. He had a talent for order, method. For patient pottering he was unequalled. He would spend a day transplanting a dozen lettuces, an evening in pruning a single rose tree. No garden like his was there in all Camberwell. He tended it as women tend a child, as lovingly and unceasingly, giving to it all the zest of his mind, all the care of his hands. Flowers with him were almost human, things to be nurtured, humoured, valued as friends. His wife declared he used to talk to them ; perhaps himself would have added that they spoke to him. At least they affected him strangely, bringing out in him all the enthusiasm and simplicity of a child. He

could tell one bloom from its fellow as shepherds tell their flocks. To him Spring was full of joyous anticipation, Summer a time of regal glory, Autumn a season of sweet regrets: but the Winter, ah, then might men but live in hope; then the earth was dead, the flowers sleeping, the sun and sky only mockeries, then was London a place of misery, of shivering gloom. But lo, the winter was gone, sweet spring-time here: a fig then for melancholy, and the dreary past! It was the sun and the sky, the flowers and the grass, the birds and the leaves; it was these now for many a month; and the Dad in his glee smote Frank on the back and for the twentieth time called him a rascal.

It was not altogether spring, however, with the Dad that evening; for, in a while, from garden affairs he turned talk to more general matters, then to personal concerns, and quickly to some wintry trifles that gave him concern. It was the Office: and at the word Frank smiled. All was not to the Dad's satisfaction there. The young men were impertinent at times; the seniors supercilious; the chiefs inclined to make light of his complaints. He knew nothing definite; he only suspected; somehow, he fancied that a plan was on foot—among those who were jealous of him, mind you—to oust him from his responsible and important post.

"Oh, absurd, Dad," Frank cried. "Man alive, have wit!"

"Ah yes, Frank; but believe me it is not absurd. I can see it," said the Dad, with a jerk of his head. "I know it. There are many waiting anxiously for my post. I assure you, Frank, mine is most re-

sponsible work—most responsible. Really, I have a great deal to do. . . . But they won't beat me, Frank; they won't. I'm—I'm not an old man yet. I'm just as good now as I was twenty years ago; there are many years of good work still before me."

"Why, of course, Dad," said Frank, with his hand on the old man's shoulder; "of course. Who denies it? Who but yourself puts these absurd fancies in your head. Look here, now; roll another cigarette and have done, for I'm sick at heart of this office."

"But, Frank," interrupted the Dad, "you don't know. Let me explain."

"Not a word, Dad. I know better than you. I know that your most important work will last as long as you can crawl. Dad, Dad, have sense. Who can want to injure you? Who could have the heart? Who in the world but yourself could fill that most responsible post? You doing the work of three for the pay of one!"

The old man pondered a while; then, with Spring nearly full in them, raised his eyes.

"You think that, Frank? You're sure of that?"

"Quite, Dad."

"And you think that some day—soon—they'll recognise my talent and reward me for my long services? Eh, Frank, do you think that?"

"I do, Dad." And at the word (for which may Frank Barry be forgiven), Spring flashed clear on the Dad's face, and light-hearted as a boy he hurried Frank indoors for a glass of ale and a chat with the Mother. "I must tell her," said he, as he went; "I must tell her. I was cross at tea-time, Frank—oh, I was a bear; I was a bear."

It was nearing dusk when, ale and pipe finished, the Mother's loving solicitude concerning Marian and the boy satisfied, and the Dad delivered of his good news, Frank bade the old couple good-bye, passed through the gate, waved his hand, and turned his face for—where? Was it home and Marian, or Walworth and the Butlers? He was undecided, even now. All day there had been no halting, all the evening his purpose had held: now, at the last moment, his feet wavered. Something within cried for home; something without shouted for away. Which should it be? he asked himself again and again, as slowly he walked down the street. There was no harm in going—none. Still, which should it be? he asked himself once more and, on the pavement-edge stood looking vacantly across the squalor of Wyndham Road. On this hand was home; on that away. Home perhaps was best; but . . . Mechanically, you might say, he slewed round; and his face was for Walworth. And at the decision his throat dried, his breath quickened, and like a man he felt set forth on an adventure.

From the noisome gloom of Wyndham Road he issued quick upon the glare of Camberwell Road; turned to the left past Emmanuel's Church (Marian and he had been married there not a great while ago), and in a while was whipped into the turmoil of Camberwell Gate. He was now in Walworth—great, drear, ugly Walworth—and nearing his destination; unconsciously his stride shortened and his eyes went wandering here and there. He felt calm and easy; yet, strange to say, saw little and heard nothing of the street's commotion. Once, he stopped at a drap-

er's window and for five minutes stared at a bonnet which he did not see; again, he stumbled blindly against a bricklayer and was greeted with oaths which he did not hear. He came to East Street; looked awhile at the sign; dropped his chin in thought; then turned suddenly, buttoned his coat—and plunged.

East Street has a bad name in Walworth. It is narrow, grimy, unsavoury; its shops are small and dingy; often enough on either hand the homes of the poor stand huddled in their squalor; day and night there the pavements seethe, God-forsaken children litter them, unkempt women infest them, grim shapes of men slouch up and down; you get rough manners down there, and foul speech, and ways of life that are little civilised; but why, in mighty London, give bad names because of things like these? Why deign them notice? Are they not commonplaces of the inevitable? East Street; do not the stars every night shine down on countless such noisome tracks through this great wilderness? Is not Walworth itself full of them, a little better-conditioned, maybe, something more refined and respectable, to be sure; but dens of sin, of hypocrisy, dreary, sordid slums every one of them. It is a question of degree. This is a slum, that a street: Why? This is a man, that a blackguard; this a woman, that an outcast: Why again? We stand admiring the sunshine (Frank Barry did it a while ago) on the noble sidewalks of Camberwell New Road, and later tread fearfully (see Frank Barry over there) the sunless pavement of East Street; and now we are glad, and now disgusted: And why?

One may well ask. And well may one ask it of Mr. Frank Barry, author, journalist, gentleman, stepping daintily along there between the gutters, shunning contamination with the pavements, casting his supercilious eye right and left in search of the home of the Butlers.

He found it at last; in a dingy row of two-story houses which face the north, and look upon a tract of waste ground, and have at the farther end full sight and company of a thriving public house. The front window showed a jumbled collection of toys, stationery, confectionery; the door was open; boldly Frank entered, and found himself in a narrow hall, with a staircase running up from his feet and a doorway on his left opening on the shop. He stood a minute; then rapping with his stick brought a bare-armed woman, who eyed him askance, answered civilly, and directed him upstairs. Cautiously, for the hall was nearly dark and the steps rickety, he mounted; came to a landing, groped his way along the wall, and stopped before a door. He knocked; heard a heavy foot come towards him; then:

"Who are ye?"

"It's I, Mrs. Butler. May I come in?"

"An' who's I? What are ye?"

"Frank Barry."

"Aw!"

There was a scurry inside, a sound of whispering, a shifting of chairs, then a fumble at the door; and there stood Sarah.

"Aw," said she; "an' it's you? Aw, now! But come in, Mr. Barry; come in."

"Thank you, Mrs. Butler;" and Frank entered.

He found a low, narrow room ; a window looking upon the street, a fireplace facing it, in the partition-wall a second door, which, as Frank entered, was gently closed. The floor was bare ; a glass lamp stood among cups and saucers on a deal table ; some chairs, boxes, a truckle bed, boots, saucepans, lumber, were scattered about ; damp-stains showed on the walls, the ceiling was dirty and cracked ; a rank odour of cooking pervaded the room.

Sarah closed the door ; set a chair beside the table, wiped it with her apron, invited Frank to sit down. "To think of it bein' you," she repeated ; "aw sure. Now, who'd ha' thought it ?"

"But I said I'd come, Mrs. Butler." Frank settled himself in the rickety chair and crossed his knees. "In fact I promised ; and," spreading his hands, "here I am."

"Aw, yis," said Sarah. "Aw yis ; but sure—"

"You never thought I'd come." Frank smiled. "Well I have, you see ; so you'll have to make the best of me." It was the old Inishrath manner, the manner of Frank at his suavest. Sarah, with her back to the cupboard and her face to the inner door, sat down, spread her apron, and folded her hands in her lap. "Well, and how are you ?" Frank went on.

Ah, Sarah was well enough, so she was ; as well as God willed her to be. And Mr. Barry, how was he keeping ? Oh, Frank was flourishing ; was much the same as when Sarah last saw him.

"By the way, Mrs. Butler," said he, "I hope my letter was of use to John. He got it, of course ?"

"He did," answered Sarah, her eyes on her hands. "He was thankful to ye. He's just the same," said

Sarah, looking up. Both voice and eyes were big with meaning. "He'll be out now, gone to see someone. But he'll be back. Yis. It's powerful anxious he'd be to see ye, Mr. Barry. Sure he often talks o' ye."

"Does he, now?" said Frank. "Poor old John!" Cheek on palm, he looked thoughtfully at the lamp, repeating, "Poor old John." Sarah gave him a narrow, swift look; turned her eyes to the inner door; then, as if throwing off her burden of constraint, rose quickly and opened the cupboard.

"But sure this is a poor welcome I'm givin' ye," she said, and bringing forth a black bottle and two glasses, stood them on the table. "I dunno what's come over me. Mr. Barry, you'll take a drop o' somethin' from me?" Sarah pushed forward a glass. "Just a wee drop—an' help yourself."

It were an insult to refuse. Frank poured out some gin, helped the protesting Sarah to a little; raised his glass. "Here's luck," was his word; "The same to you," said Sarah: and the toast passed.

A while of talk ensued, of talk about local affairs, Irish affairs, the weather, the markets; and Frank was suave and Sarah affable, yet was the manner of either not altogether without restraint. Perhaps Frank's conscience was stirring, perhaps his thoughts kept wandering in quest of John, or Nan; and for Sarah, did she not know that the landlady was listening at the stair-foot, and were not her eyes in constant travel between Frank's face and that inner door. Sometimes she made as if to rise; now and then a frown darkened her face: at last, the conversation flagging,

she rose hastily, excused herself to Frank, crossed to the inner door, went in and closed it behind her.

Frank twisted in his chair and looked round the room. It was in sorry contrast, he found, with the old Irish home, with the cheerful kitchen, the little earthen-floored parlour even; yet it was a home, a better one than he had expected to see, and something about it, the ordering of it, the arrangement of its knick-knacks, the presence there of some well-remembered trifles—a sampler on the wall, an ornament on the mantelshelf, an antimacassar on a chair—brought vivid memory to Frank of the whitewashed cottage that once stood pleasantly, and now kept gloomy vigil, on the barren slope of Inishrath. Brought thought of Nan, too, and of her magic touch, giving he knew not what air of refinement, distinction, to the look of things the simplest and most ordinary. Yes; the trace of Nan's hand was there—and there. He could have sworn to Nan's taste in the placing of those vases, the tilt of that photograph. The room was hers, even as the old-time parlour had been hers. How well he remembered it; remembered Nan's coming in, her simple welcome, her demure air, as she sat twisting her ring round her finger. Her ring? Did she wear it now? he wondered. Ted, where was he? And Nan herself? He wished he could see her. Was she changed? What would she say? And where had Sarah gone? To whom had she whispered whilst yet he stood on the landing? Hark. To whom was she speaking now? Her voice was raised; shrill it came and angry. "You're a fool," she was saying; "a little fool. What harm could it do ye? Come out, I tell ye—

I tell ye it's disgraceful. I tell ye your father'll be mad wi' ye. Aren't ye comin', I say?" Then—oh, hush—then a soft voice answering firmly: "No, mother, I'll not;" and with that, a vicious pluck at the door and the coming again of Sarah.

An angry flush was on her face, an ugly glitter in her eye, as quickly she snapped the latch, turned and crossed the floor. At once Frank rose.

"It's getting late, Mrs. Butler," said he. "I must be off, I fear."

Sarah stopped.

"Ay?" she said. "Well, I wouldn't be keepin' ye. Sure it's little company an' less comfort you'll find here."

Frank moved towards the door.

"It isn't that, Mrs. Butler," said he, turning. "You know it's not that."

"I know nothin', Mr. Barry."

"Indeed?" Frank smiled, shrugged his shoulders. "Well, then, we'll leave it at that, Mrs. Butler. Good-bye. And remember me kindly to John."

He put out his hand; but Sarah caught his arm.

"Ah, don't be heedin' me," she pleaded. "I was angered. Listen," whispered she, with a glance back at the inner door; "listen; did ye hear me?"

"Yes," answered Frank.

"'Twas nothin'," whispered Sarah; "'twas nothin'. She's—she's tired. 'Twas too sudden. Another time, mebbe—when John's here. You'll come again to see John?"

Again Frank smiled.

"Yes; I'll come again to see John. Good-bye, Mrs. Butler."

"Good-bye, sir; an' glad I am to see ye. Aisy now," said Sarah; then turned and took up the lamp. "Sure that stair's ojus dangerous."

"Yes, it is." Frank went down a step or two; stopped, looked up at Sarah, standing by the balustrade, with the lamp high in her hand.

"There's one thing, Mrs. Butler," said he, "I wanted to say. If ever you or John wish to see me, or want me to do anything, just drop me a line, and I'll come. I wouldn't call. The chances are I might be out, or very busy, or——" Frank dropped his eyes, fell to tapping the balustrade with his stick. "Well, you see, bachelors are not in the habit of receiving visitors. You understand, Mrs. Butler, don't you?"

"Aw, to be sure," said Sarah; "to be sure. I know right well."

"That's right," said Frank, looking up. "And you don't mind my mentioning it?" he asked, with a smile.

"Ah, not at all; not at all. . . . An' we'll be seein' ye again, mebbe, some day?"

"Yes—when John's at home."

And, with a laugh and a wave of his hand, Frank turned from Sarah, leaving her well content.

CHAPTER VI.

To Frank Barry it was pleasant relief, that quick stepping from the stuffy hall into the light and freshness even of East Street. There was a snap in the air, a bracing coolness, as of the sea in summer time. He felt exhilarated, well satisfied; he drew a long breath, lighted a cigarette, and, standing by the curb, looked up at the sky. It was full of stars; as his eyes found them, Frank told himself that he had managed Sarah well. Ah, but she was deep! But not deep enough. Frank Barry saw through her little scheme. Right glad she would be for Mr. Frank to come visiting—when John was at home. Very anxious she was now for Nan to see Mr. Frank. Nan? Why had she refused? Was it because of the old days, the old happenings? What was she doing, thinking, even then? Turning, he looked up—back went Sarah's face from one window; a corner of the blind dropped behind the other; below, the bare-armed landlady shrank quickly into the gloom of her shop.

It was time to move, Frank thought. He took to the roadway, and set out for home. The street was now all bustle and glare, the pavements thronged, the air quick with clamour. Girls were singing, women shrilling, men laughing, shouting. There

were children everywhere; playing, fighting, squalling, carrying beer jugs, bottles of paraffin, dabs of butter on plates, penn'orths of treacle in cups. Here, some urchins were blowing mouth-organs; there, a rival band was making merry over whistle and tea-tray. A party of connoisseurs was gathered round the cages outside a bird-fancier's. At the butcher's, haggard women, in black shawls and bonnets, stood calculating, bargaining, turning over the odds and ends on the block, fondly eyeing the joints on the hooks, the sheeps-heads on the counter. From the grocer's came a rich odour of cheese and bacon; round the public-houses the air was hot and heavy; a sickening smell of rancid fat filled the street. And the costermongers shouted, and the naphthalamps flared, and up and down, in and out, went the weary feet of the hopeless poor, tramping, pattering, shuffling; and among them the shrinking feet (think of it!) of Mr. Frank Barry.

He had almost reached the high street, when someone caught him by the arm, turned him round, peered into his face; then clutched at his hand. It was John Butler.

"Why, Frank, man," went John, almost tearfully, and tightened his grip at each word; "Frank, me son! An' it's you? Aw, me bould boy, but I'm glad to see ye. Holy king, but this is great! Now, now. Sure, who'd ha' thought it—An' how are ye, Frank? Let's look at ye. Aw, jist the same; jist the same. Man alive! But come away; come away home till ye see Sarah. Eh? You've been to see her? Well, divil cares; come again; come on, I tell ye." Excitedly John pulled at Frank's arm. "Well, come

somewhere else, then ; for, dang me, if I let ye go till I have a talk wi' ye. ”

They turned into a public house, found a private bar, settled themselves in a quiet corner behind a table. John ordered drink, gin for himself (sure sign of deterioration in an Irishman), whisky for Frank ; lit his pipe, sprawled his elbows over the table and went on talking.

He also had changed, and for the worse, Frank found ; but not so woefully as had Sarah. He still kept his appearance of health, his ruddy colour and freshness of cheek and eye. He was dressed decently in an old tweed suit—it had done duty of Sundays in the old days, Frank remembered—brown hat and heavy boots ; across his waistcoat dangled a slim gold chain—another relic of old decency—and a red cotton handkerchief was knotted round his neck : it was still the old John Butler, yet all over him had wandered the hand of change. He was puffy below the eyes, tremulous of hand and lip ; his look was somewhat furtive, his voice not quite so honest in its ring, his laugh but an echo of the old hearty bellow. No longer did he swing carelessly along, he slouched ; he looked older, grayer, lazier, might have been cleaner, smoked vile tobacco, smelt horribly of gin. Yet the old John was still there, the old, good-natured, blustering John ; grip still like a vice, heart sound as a bell, laugh and voice ringing out noisily, his torrent of speech as impetuous as ever ? Torrent ? It was Niagara itself that swamped Frank, sitting there beyond the marble-topped table.

And truly then, if ever, was John's tongue to be excused. So much had happened, so long a time

gone; there was such a power to say. Three years, three whole long years: and then to meet his old friend Frank in the streets of London. Think of that, sir! There in London town itself. Man alive! Who'd have dreamt, three years ago, that this blessed night the two of them would be sitting in a London public house, and Inishrath be empty, and the fields a wilderness. Ah, it made him wild to think of that, made him long to cut the throat of every landlord in the world. The divils; the black-hearted divils! To turn them out like ducks from a turf-house, and that before the ould man had grass on his grave; to persecute them, threaten them. But sure Frank knew; sure Sarah had told him, or the uncle had written? No. Then let Frank listen: and hammering the table, whacking his hands, wagging his finger in Frank's face, hissing scorn, breathing vengeance, damnation, John poured out the story of his wrongs.

It took long to tell, brought great beads on John's brow, gave Frank no little amusement, if but small surprise; came to an end at last and gave place to the story of that last dread day in Inishrath, it's heart-breakings, trials.

"Ah, Frank, man, 'twas hell itself. I thought I'd die dead. To see the fields, an' the trees, an' the lake; to see the house yonder, an' it empty, an' could, an' cheerless; to turn one's back on it all, an' bid it good-bye, an' go cryin' down to the shore; an' to hear the wailin' o' the women, an' the sobbin' o' the men; an' the hands all out, an' iveryone callin' good-bye; an' the hearts dead in us, Frank, knowin' that niver, niver we'd see them, or the fields, or anythin', again; an' then to step into the cot an' sail

away, away, away—Aw, Frank, me son, 'twas worse nor the death-grip itself. It nearly kilt us dead. Aw, poor Sarah, an' poor Nan; the sight o' them was ojus, sobbin', sobbin', moanin', moanin', callin' out: 'Ah, good-bye, good-bye, good-bye'.... But it all passed," said John, and drew his cuff across his eyes; then quickly went on with a realistic, and at times amusing, account of the journey to Greenore; the perilous passage across the great, blue ocean (so John called it); the long, wonderful ride from Holy-head to London; the blank days of bewilderment that awaited them outside the gates of Euston; the search for lodgings, work; the struggles here, fights there, disappointments on all sides. If it hadn't been for the trifle brought with them from the sale of the furniture, only for Nan's luck in getting work, only for the odd jobs that came to Sarah, God knows they'd have been among the worms long ago. As for himself, said John; then paused, shook his head, suddenly stretched his hand towards Frank across the table.

"Lay it there, me son," said he, "for writin' that letter. 'Twas grand, as good a piece of English as I iver read. 'Twas so. Lay it there; an' God bless ye for it."

"It was nothing, John; nothing at all. I was distressed I could do no more. But I hope," said Frank, "it did some good—brought some luck your way, John?"

Again John shook his head.

"Naw," said he, "it didn't — not a stroke. It's useless, I tell ye, Frank Barry," cried John and smote the table; "it's useless me tryin'. They won't

have me; won't look at me; won't read what I bring them; won't throw sixpence in me way. Ah, sirs, what I've been through. Ah, sirs, sirs." John leant head on hand, mournfully sat staring at his empty glass. "What I've been through," he mumbled. "What I've endured."

Frank laughed silently; then:

"Yes; you've been through a great deal, no doubt, John. I'm quite sure you've tried your hardest. Still—" Frank paused, very deliberately. John looked at him.

"Well? Finish the word, Frank Barry."

"I can't help thinking, John, that somewhere in London there must be work waiting for you, waiting just for the finding. It seems so strange—"

That was enough for John.

"Ay, it does." Almost fiercely he spoke, his face pushed across the table. "It seems mighty strange. That's what more than you's said, Frank Barry. That's what Sarah's told me till I'm sick o' hearin' it. That's what Ted Ross's always throwin' at me."

"Ted Ross!"

"Ay, Ted Ross," continued John, nor paused to read the surprise in Frank's eyes; "that's what Ted Ross is always sayin' too. As if I hadn't tried, hadn't wore the boots off me feet, hadn't tramped the length an' breadth o' London. Listen to me, Frank Barry; listen well to me," said John, and forthwith began the story of his adventures in quest of work.

It was long, pitiful, very true. The man had really tried; walked weary miles, waited weary

hours, endured many rebuffs, disappointments; done most things that mortal can to bring work to his hands. And only seldom had it come; for quite impossible was it for John Butler ever to button his coat on anyone but himself. There was the difficulty. John's intentions were good, his efforts heroic; always remained himself, a big, soft-handed, blethering Irishman, one who wanted work yet loathed it, spoke one thing and meant the other, said he was this and looked that. So the many refused his services; and the few who accepted soon repented. He tried carrying a hod one day, and came home to dinner. For a whole morning he drove a van; then, let the horse fall and smash his knees. Some one, after much trouble, got him a post as tramcar driver; and John the first morning was late, the second late, the third dismissed. Like that it was all through the record. He spent a week in finding something, an hour or less in losing it. Thirty shillings (no less) lured him out one morning, dwindled quick to five, came home at night to Sarah as sixpence earned in holding a horse. And for the rest, there he sat, after six months of London, as empty of pocket, idle of hand, hopeless of real endeavour as ever he had been on the shores of Inish-rath. It was piteous, thought Frank Barry; piteous but inevitable.

"So that's how things stand, John," said Frank, at last.

"That's it, Frank; there's the whole truth for ye."

"And you're doing nothing, earning nothing?"

"Not a blessed halfpenny, Frank; not one."

"And what do you mean to do?"

"Do? Is it that ye ask me, Frank Barry, after all I've said? Do! Great king, what more can I do? Haven't I been tellin' ye?"

"I know, John. And meantime how do you spend your days?"

John's eyes dropped.

"Aw, slitherin' about—tryin' for a job somewhere—goin' here an' here."

"I know," said Frank again; then, quickly: "Are there any clubs about this neighbourhood, John?"

Up came John's eyes.

"Clubs? Why d'ye ax me that? Has anyone been tellin' ye? Aw, be jabers, Frank," said John, leaning forward, his face aflame with sudden eagerness, "but ye must come to hear us. It's the power-fullest place in the world. There's men there could knock Gladstone into a cocked hat. Niver did ye hear such speakin'. *Whoo-o!* Some nights you'd think the roof'd fly. Listen to me, Frank. T'other night I was in fine fettle. Man, the words streamed from me. I was ready for anything. A chap got up and contradicted me, called me names, said I was only a blusterer, an' all the rest. Ah," cried John, opening his arms, "I jist snapped me jaws at him—an' he was gone, wiped out as clean as if the flure had gaped for him. . . . But you'll come wi' me, sometime, Frank? Ye will now?"

"All right, John," answered Frank, "I'll come. But, tell me, does Sarah know you go to these places?"

"Why, to be sure, to be sure, Frank."

"And she doesn't object?"

John pushed out his lips, rubbed his chin, slyly looked across at Frank.

"You'd be the divil at axin' questions, Frank, me boy," said he. "Is there ever another you'd be wishful to put to me?"

"Plenty, John," answered Frank, with a smile. "Here's another: What brought Ted Ross to London?"

"Nan," said John simply; and, hearing the word, Frank flushed, laid down his pipe and sat fingering its stem. "Ay," John went on, "that's the answer, surely. But sure ye know that yourself, Frank? Eh?"

Frank nodded.

"Aw, to be sure. Niver was the like o' Ted in this world. He sticks to things like a bulldog. Twenty times ye might fling him through the dure, an' twenty times he'd come marchin' back. It's wonderful. Night an' day he strove to keep Nan from comin'; night an' day he begged her to stay wi' him."

"And she wouldn't?" said Frank, looking up.

"Naw. She wouldn't have him, wouldn't promise him; 'd hardly speak to him."

"Ah!"

"'Twas hard to understand her," John went on, speaking slowly and softly, cheek in hand, eyes on table. "God knows, the sight of her nearly broke the heart in me. She mooned and moped, an' sighed an' cried, an' went about the house like a ghost, and the eyes in her face just like two black beads. An' Sarah'd talk an' talk, an' I'd try to humour her at

times, an' Ted 'd come night after night. But 'twas all no use, no use at all."

Frank stretched out and gripped John by the wrist.

"Tell me, John," said he, in a straining voice. "Was this three years ago?"

"Ay. 'Twas, Frank. Och, it was." Frank drew back his hand. "Aw, 'twas a pity o' the crature, an ojus pity. She took things powerful to heart. You'd think that after a while she'd forget things—an' tire o' things—an' lift her head again—an' listen to Ted an' us all. You'd think that. But no. She was niver the same again—niver. She's not herself yet. If ye met her, Frank, you'd hardly know her. Not that I'd be sayin' a word agen her, not one. God knows, that'd be far from me. She's the best girl iver left Ireland; there's not her like in London this minute. Off she goes, ivery mornin', an' there she sits the whole blessed day, stitchin' an' stitchin'; an' ivery Saturday home she brings all she's earnt, ivery penny of it. . . . What'd we do without her?" moaned John. "What, in God's name, 'd become of us only for her? Suppose she'd marry Ted, or—?"

Frank raised his eyes.

"Is there a chance of that, John?"

"Hm." John shook his head. "I dunno. I'd be glad, in a way, if I could think it. Ted deserves her; ay, if she was twice Nan he deserves her. Think of all he's done. Think o' leavin' his good prospects in the ould country, an' comin' here to slave like a nigger at the docks, an' live in a bit of a room, an' half starve himself. Aw, it's wonderful," cried John; "it's astonishing."

John paused, and began filling his pipe. Frank sat drumming his fingers on the rim of his glass; suddenly twisted round and rested both elbows on the table.

"You must all have thought me a pretty scoundrel, John," he said. "You must have wished often enough you could lay hands on me?"

John looked at him.

"Eh? What's that? When?" he asked.

"Why, three years ago—the time you've been speaking of, John. Ah, you needn't pretend. I know it. I was a scoundrel. It would have served me right had you followed me and twisted my neck."

"Ah, Lord, no," interrupted John. "Lord of Heaven, no! Sure, we knew well enough."

"But it would, I tell you," cried Frank; "I say it would. It was all my fault. Listen to me, John. Before Heaven, it was the proudest moment of my life when Nan chose me that night; and I would have married her only—only ——"

There came to Frank Barry, even there in that garish public house, another golden opportunity, another moment of good impulse. *Tell John all, something whispered to him, tell him you are married; then go home, this very night, and bare your heart to Marian. Tell,* went the voice: and Frank hesitated—wavered—cowed.

"John, I couldn't," he said, with a wave of his hand; "I couldn't. There were—other things to be considered. I wasn't quite free. I wasn't—" He stopped, with a quick gesture of disgust. "I can't explain," he cried. "I can't. There were other things: that's all."

Frank snatched at his glass. John broke into expostulation. Frank had taken his words in the wrong way. He hadn't been hinting, hadn't been blaming Frank. It had all been Nan's foolishness. Ted was the kind of man for Nan. Frank was a scholar and a gentleman.

"Look here, John," said Frank; "you're only making matters worse. Drop the subject, like a good man."

"But, Frank, ye must hear me. Sure, you're all wrong. Now, now, jist a word."

"Not one," answered Frank. "Not a word."

"But, Frank, me son—"

"John, be quiet!"

"Aw, very well, me boy. Jist as ye like."

John fell silent for a minute; then, a fresh pipe going freely, and a replenished glass standing dutifully by his elbow, started anew; tried this topic and that; at last made play round the wonders of London.

Ah, London was the place, sirs; the eye of the world it was. The man that hadn't seen it, John affirmed, hadn't lived. Some things he regretted, many things were bitter; for all that, London was the place for John. It gripped you, opened its arms and just hugged you to itself. You hated it one day; loved it the next.. It was so full of wonders. There was such a power to see. Never was he tired of the streets. "Listen to the roar of it," said John, turning his head for a moment. "Look at the crowds, an' the shops, an' the glitter of it all. Man, it's wonderful. Think o' the size of it, a whole countryside o' houses. I watched an ould crow flyin' over it th'other day, an' begob it made me laugh.

Think o' the bewilderment of it, strayed away from some hillside or other, an' it bein' fired at wi' all the smoke from all the chimbleys. An' then to stand on one o' the bridges an' look here an' there. Sure as day, Frank, the first night I did that, 'twas the sky I thought had come down an' all the stars were rushin' about. An' then the people, the tribes an' tribes o' them—millions swarmin' the streets all day, millions sittin' at home at night, millions all asleep 'bout the same time, an' only one big roof, ye might say, over them all. Ah, man, man," said John, with a solemn shake of the head; "man alive, I wonder what the angels above'd be thinkin' of it all."

"I wonder, indeed," laughed Frank, rising. "And I wonder what they're thinking of us, sitting here at this time of the night."

"Ay," said John; "it's themselves must have sprees. Well, we've had a bully evenin', Frank, me boy," said John, as, a few minutes later, he stood holding Frank's hand at the corner of East Street; "a bully evenin', an' God be good to ye, me son, an' thank ye for your company. But, you'll come again soon, won't ye? You'll promise, now? That's right. Good-night, me boy."

"Good-night, John." Frank turned, walked a step, stopped. "John," he called: "John. Look here. I wouldn't send Sarah again to see me at my place. It's hardly the thing, you know, and I'm out a great deal, and usually very busy. If you want anything, write and I'll come. You understand, don't you?"

"Aw, to be sure. All right, me boy; all right." And, with a wave of his arm, John turned for the wastes of East Street.

But Frank started for the gardens of Camberwell ; and one Ted Ross, standing on the opposite pavement with his face to the road, saw him go.

Marian was asleep when Frank reached home. He stood looking at her a moment ; then stole round the bed-foot, and bent over the boy's cot. Rosy and chubby, the child lay in its sweet peacefulness, a hand nestled beneath its curls, the other lying softly on the white counterpane. "Dear little man," said Frank within himself ; "my sweet little man." He moved away, turned up the light, and Marian woke.

"Oh, it's you, Frank. How late you are."

"Yes, dear. It is late. It's disgraceful, I know. But Dad would keep me ; and then I went for a stroll and met someone. Who do you think it was, Marian ? Why, the husband of the very woman who called here one night a while ago. And such a story he told me ; such a rigmarole ! But never mind now ; go to sleep, and I'll tell you in the morning."

CHAPTER VII.

THE story, which, over the breakfast-table next morning, Frank told Marian, and which, early in the days that followed, he repeated for the benefit of Rab Lindsay and the Dad, was, from some points of view, not uninteresting. It was clever, spontaneous, told with gusto and humour, and through it the figure of John Butler—John tramping London for work, carrying a hod, driving a tramcar, John slithering along the pavements, holding forth at clubs and meetings—marched boldly, coat-tails flying, hands darting, voice blundering and rolling; as fine a piece of caricature, indeed, as ever whirled shillelagh upon the stage.

And it was of John only, one need hardly say, that Frank spoke. No mention was there of the home in East Street, of Sarah, or Nan, or Ted; of course not. It is obvious that no necessity existed for such mention; it is equally obvious that for Frank Barry to go blundering adown the paths of deception, was no longer to be expected of him. He was now too clever for that, too much at his ease. He had outlived the period when panic was likely to shake from his fingers the key of the skeleton cupboard. He had won some skill in the art of not seeing the other things, the suppressed things, the things that stood nearest the gate of his mind; stood there, each in its own little chamber, with John Butler, or an-

other, playing deceptive antics before the door, ready at the merest beckoning to glide forth into the clear light of thought. He could close his eyes now upon these and forget them; or, when occasion served, could summon and view them without great concern. He felt secure, in short; no longer afraid. Things had brightened quite lately. Sarah, his enemy, she of the wiles, was nobbled. John was friendly. All was well, and promising well, between him and Marian. No need was there now to do more or less than be his old self, be happy with wife and friends; and, for the rest, give occasional thought to those other things—the things concerning Sarah and her wiles, for instance, or John and his disclosures, or Nan and her pitiful history.

Nan, and her story? Ah, here was something that called for more than an occasional thought, that deserved, indeed, and demanded very constant attention. Nearest of all was Nan to the gate, oftenest beckoned forth. At all times of the day, in the deep watches of the night, whilst he worked, or talked with Marian, or sported with the boy, there, clear to be seen, was Nan, all her pitiful story deep in her eyes—a melancholy figure.

And all for him, thought Frank Barry. Yes, and all because of him, came the after-thought. He had plucked back the veil, taught her love, and in the teaching won her heart; then, without a word, had slunk away and left her to misery. He had said: *She will forget, in a month or two all will be well with her again*; and, behold, it was himself who had forgotten and Nan who had remembered! She had pined, lived dark days of sorrow, had said: *Some day, maybe, he*

will come. And he never came, hardly gave her a thought all through those dark days. *She has forgotten me now*, he had said; and again, *She is married now.* And she had not forgotten, had not married; rather, had stood there on the hillside (how clearly he saw her!), straining her eyes across the waters, sobbing her heart out, day by day growing paler and more hopeless. "*God knows, the sight of her nearly broke the heart in me. She mooned and moped, and sighed and cried. . . .*"

And all for him, Frank Barry! What had he done, who was he, that a woman should so sacrifice herself for his sake? He was not worth it. God knows, he was not; still, could he be else than glad at thought of it? Even if it were cruel, wrong, could he be other than glad? Nan had loved him, had kept faithful to her love; was—yes, he knew it—was faithful still, even at that very hour. He knew it. "*She was never the same again, never. She's not the same yet, If ye met her, Frank, you'd hardly know her.*"

Not know Nan? Just try him, John Butler! Yes, and he should be tried; sooner or later, he and Nan should come face to face, and he should see for himself, speak for himself.

It was usually about this point that Frank Barry used to cease rambling, fall grave, and tell himself that, as became a respectable married man and father of a family, it behoved him to be careful. It was all very well to be sentimental, to have his little flings of regret and emotion; let him be quite clear, nevertheless, that neither sentiment nor emotion was likely just here to serve him wisely. Rather, it was

commonsense he needed, that and a clear view of things. And commonsense told him plainly that, in the clear view of things, these ramblings and vapourings might soon result in his making somewhat of a fool of himself. He must be very careful. Nan Butler was no longer anything in the world to him. Marian now was his all and all; and Nan Butler, let sentiment gush as it might, must stand outside the pale. He had cared for her once; now he did not, and must not. All that was dead and buried; and if, as it seemed, she still remembered and hoped—well, 'twas pity, but not to be helped. Such considerations must not now for a moment blur that clear view of things. He might see her, help her perhaps to higher and better things; but clearly must he make it understood that only motives of friendship and duty . . . Enough of that! Let him put the matter plainly and have done.

Over there in East Street, so Frank Barry put the matter to himself, Nan Butler was pining, moping, wasting; and this she was doing, in the delusion—yes, he must face it—that he, Frank Barry, was unmarried and might one day come to claim her. He knew it was so; and in face of that knowledge his duty lay clear as daylight. Nan must be undeceived, saved from herself; and he must save her. He must see the girl; then very gently kill her hopes and delusions, then by way of reparation, offer help and sympathy to her and hers. It was his duty and he must do it; he owed reparation and he must pay it. Only (and here you can picture Frank wagging a cautious finger at himself), he must be careful, discreet, firm, keep sentiment down with a

strong hand. He must say nothing about Marian (of course not), or of his present ways of life; time enough, he was sure, when Nan was married and Sarah no longer wily, to speak of these things. And he must be discreet with Marian. And he must keep wide of Sarah and the home in East Street. And he must only see Nan once or twice. And he must see her very soon.

Yes, he must see her very soon, said Frank; so, not many days after the time of his meeting John, turned his feet, cautiously and discreetly, once more for the wilds of Walworth and tried for a meeting with Nan.

He met difficulties. The getting away from home and Marian offered few; a convenient headache throbbing for fresh air, an aching back and sluggish circulation demanding immediate exercise, the various calls of business, these and their like came readily as excuses and with Marian were always effectual. But the meeting with Nan, which of necessity implied many restrictions, was not managed so simply. It was just, so he told himself, as if fate—fate, forsooth—had willed them not to meet, or Nan was avoiding him, or someone keeping her away; for, though he watched patiently (ah, the weariness of the vigil!) at the corner of East Street and spent hours (ah, the indignity of the going!) in furtive wanderings along its pavements, though, time and again, he saw the tramcars unload at Camberwell Gate, and constantly altered the hour of his coming, not once during many nights had he even sight of her. Did she never come out shopping? How and when did she return from work? Had fate decreed that

they were not to meet? he would ask himself, as dolefully he wended homewards; then suddenly, at thought of the next time, would step out briskly—step out for home and Marian. And so for long enough the spring nights went.

He saw friends now and then. Sarah he met several times, carrying paraffin oil in a bottle, or beer in a jug, or firewood in her apron; and Sarah would smirk and offer her hand, and invite him in, and show full in her face the knowledge of what brought him to East Street. "Come in, now," she said, one night, gripping Frank's sleeve; "come, I've something to show ye." And Frank once again climbed the narrow stair, and sat him down in the stuffy room; and once again was the comedy of the other room played for his hearing and benefit. "Aren't ye comin' in, I say?" cried Sarah.

"No, no," went the other voice. And down the stairs Frank stumbled, his ears burning and something like shame in his eyes. But he had vowed to see Nan.

John also he met more than once; and always was John just as effusive, as tight in the grip, as malodorous of breath as ever. "Won't ye be comin' in?" John would shout, and lurch on the pavement. "Arrah, come on, man, come away wi' ye. Sure they'll be all at home, Sarah, an' Nan, an' mebbe Ted himself. What! you'll not? Arrah, what in blazes ails ye, Frank? Is it too proud you're gettin'? Well, see here, then," John would go on, when Frank had satisfactorily explained; "will ye be comin' somewhere else, jist over the way to have a toothful for ould acquaintance sake? Eh? You'll not! Well,

see here then, damme, but you'll come to th' other place. Come on, I'm tellin' ye, or, be the king, I'll hit ye!" And off Frank would go, arm in arm with John, to spend a miserable hour listening to the jingle of pots, the rattle of dominoes, within the dreary walls of some third-rate club-house. And, one night, John waxed mighty on the wrongs of ould Ireland; and all was sound and fury.

Ted, too, Frank met in his wanderings, and met him often; but Nan was never with him, and Ted not once so much as turned his eyes, but marched straight past, lips tight, face set, his whole manner a very lesson in contemptuousness. And Frank, having now no grudge against Ted, being anxious rather to play his friend, felt amused at first, then haughty in turn, last of all indignant. Who was this clodhopper, to treat him so? Who had the better right to walk that pavement: a gentleman and a scholar, or a lout and a blockhead? Oh, he owed Mr. Ted Ross a score or two. It was he who kept Nan away; he knew it was. He had poisoned her mind against him. He was dogging his steps, waiting to do him harm. And, damme, who cared? Let the lout come on. Just wait till the very next time.

How merciful was the dispensation that interposed something, even Nan herself, between Ted and the terrors of that very next time.

It happened quite by chance, as much sooner it might have happened, had Frank followed Ted one night, or troubled to discover how many and various are the ways of access through Walworth to East Street. Coming from town one evening, his omnibus got blocked in that great meeting of the ways which lies

in front of the Elephant and Castle. Lowering his newspaper, he ran his eye over the medley of vehicles that stood massed behind the raised hand of a policeman; noticed here a face and there a face, glanced carelessly along the surging pavements, had a moment's glimpse of hundreds of weary men and pale women, hundreds upon hundreds of them; and suddenly of one, a girl in black, who sat almost at his elbow on top of a tramcar.

His heart leaped. He bent forward, peered hard, for dusk had come, at her face; then put his hands round his mouth and called softly: "Nan," and louder, "Nan," and louder still, "Nan, Nan."

She turned, met his eyes; went pale to the lips, looked away.

"Nan," went Frank again; "Nan, Nan." She did not answer or look; and the next minute Frank was on the seat beside her.

"Why, what a chance, what a lucky chance! Think of our meeting like this. The merest luck it was that I saw you. But how are you, Nan? Come, let me look at you." Biting her lip, Nan turned her face. "Ah, but you're pale," said Frank; then, in a moment: "Ah, but I'm glad to see you, Nan; very, very, glad." Nan sat quite still; her eyes on her lap, one hand straining on the side-rail, the other pressed against her lips. "But haven't you a word for me, Nan—just one? Come now; look at me again and say you're glad to see me." Nan shook her head. "No! Ah, don't be cruel, Nan. I know that I deserve nothing from you. Still—Look here, Nan." Frank leant closer. "I've been trying to see you very often just lately. I've wandered

about everywhere. I've missed you, I don't know how. But I want to speak to you. I must. May I, Nan? It's really about something important. I could sit by you here, if you'd let me, and—"

Nan raised her eyes quickly.

"No, no," she pleaded. "Not here. Not now."

"But why not?" asked Frank. "See, we're moving at last, and you'll only be plagued with me for a little while."

"No, no," said Nan again. "Not now; I can't, I can't."

"Then, may I sit by you, Nan, and not talk; just sit by you a little way?"

"Ah, no, no. Not now."

"Not now? Then when? Tell me, Nan: When?"

"I dunno." How sweetly the old phrase, made musical by the old voice, fell upon Frank's ear. "I dunno," it went; "I dunno."

"But I must see you, Nan," he persisted, in spite of it, and kept his eyes full on her face—her face, no longer, as he well saw, a glad picture of health and happiness, but drawn, weary, rigidly pale; "I really must. I want to explain. It concerns your happiness, Nan; believe me it does. Come, tell me, Nan. If I must go, tell me when and where I can see you."

"Ah, I dunno," moaned Nan again. "How can I?"

"Then, may I fix time and place?" Frank continued. "I can meet you anywhere, at any time. May I?" Nan did not answer; only sat looking fixedly before her, a hand on her lips, her face still

set and pale. "Well, will this suit you?" asked Frank, and named hour and place. "Will it, Nan? Remember, I want to explain." No answer yet; but a flush tinged Nan's cheeks, and her breath came quicker. "Ah, Nan, Nan, is there not even a word for me?" And at that Nan spoke.

"Very well," she said. "I'll—I'll be there. But—Ah, I dunno. What can ye have to say to me?" The flush on her cheek was deepening; words came broken and timorous. Frank touched her sleeve.

"Leave that till then," said he. "Mind, don't forget." Again he named hour and place; then moved to go. "And now I must be off," he continued; "or have you changed your mind, Nan?"

"No, no. Not now."

"Right; then I'm off. Good-bye, Nan; rather, *au revoir*." Frank put out his hand; Nan took it, raised her eyes and flushed crimson. "Good-bye, Nan."

"Ah, good-bye, good-bye;" and with the words, the moan and sob of them, like fire in his ear, Frank hurried from the car and took to the pavement.

A stream of workers was hurrying homewards, sweeping noisily and steadily against the fortunate few whose faces were turned for town and pleasure. Walworth Road was a long roar of traffic—rumbling omnibuses, jingling trams, crashing drays, jolting vans; a long roar of toil and weariness, echoing back from the grim faces of the houses, catching up the tramp of the pavements, and swelling out above the roofs towards the calm-spreading sky. There were stars up there, a few shining out in their unspeakable serenity; below was a mad rush of lights,

streaming right and left past the glare and flare of the shops. And there, the calm stars above him, the street's hubbub and dazzle beside him, walked Frank Barry, hearing only the moan of that "Good-bye, good-bye," in his ears, and giving thought only to that pale-faced Nan, seeing her still, as for that little while he had seen her, white and thin, haggard and tired, lips trembling beneath her shabby black glove, eyes weary below her black-brimmed hat. It was pitiable, thought Frank. He could almost cry. How changed she was, how woefully changed. John was right; he had hardly known her. Was this the Nan of his memory, fresh, sweet-faced, clear-eyed Nan? Surely not. Yet he had known her, had seen the old Nan in her eyes, heard the old Nan in her voice. It was the same Nan; but ah, so changed.

And all for him! Yet, surely he had not been the cause of all that, all that havoc of change. No; it was London; six months of poverty, toil, trouble, six months of London at its cruellest and worst. Think of Inishrath and then of East Street; place the old home beside those miserable lodgings; contrast the old life and surroundings with the ways and beauties of Walworth, the gloom and reek of a city workroom. Yes; these had changed her. That crime, he thanked Heaven, could not be laid to his charge.

Yet, only for him she might never have left Ireland; might be now a happy woman, with the old face and ways, sitting even then by some cosy fire-side. Only for him! And now, even now? Did she care for him still? Yes. He had read it in her

manner, her face, her eyes; had heard it throb in that last "Good-bye, good-bye."

And all so hopeless. She must put him out of her life utterly. Everything had changed. She must forget him entirely and turn to Ted, even as he, Frank Barry, must forget her entirely. . . .

Forget? Bah! How could he forget? Those days at Inishrath, that little while just gone; he must carry the memory of these to his grave.

For all that, he must do his duty, He must speak to her frankly and boldly, tell her to forget him utterly. She must marry Ted—Ted—Ted. . . . And just there, that mood upon him, that thought marching with his feet, Frank raised his eyes, and there was Ted himself.

Frank's first impulse was to look away and pass; his second turned his steps and brought him in front of Ted.

"Good-evening, Mr. Ross," said he, with a nod.

Ted stopped, looked surprised; recovered himself and nodded in turn.

"Good-evenin'," said he.

"Could I have just a word with you, Mr. Ross?" Frank went on. "I'm on my way home, perhaps you could walk with me? I've something particular to say to you."

Ted returned Frank's look steadily. He looked bigger, more muscular, more headstrong than ever.

"I know," said he. "An' about what would this talk o' yours be, Mr. Barry?"

"Come and hear," said Frank, stepping from the pavement. And Ted followed him.

They crossed the street and went down a turning

which ran in the direction of Camberwell New Road. Side by side they walked, neither speaking. Presently, when the roar of the highway had died out, Frank turned his head.

"It isn't the first time, Mr. Ross, we've met in London, I believe?" said he, in his airy way.

"No," answered Ted, bluntly. "It's not."

"May I ask whether it's your fault or mine," Frank continued, "that we've met so often?"

"What d'ye mean?"

"Just what I say. Let me make it clear to you, however. In plain English, Mr. Ross, have you been watching me lately, spying upon me, in fact?"

"I have," answered Ted, after a pause. "Yes, I have."

"I thought so. And why have you, may I ask?" said Frank, with a tilt of his head.

Ted stopped.

"Why?" he repeated. "Ye ask me why? You!" he said, with bitter emphasis.

Frank walked on a step, turned and nodded.

"Yes; I ask."

Ted hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat.

"Look here, Mr. Frank Barry," said he; "you're a mighty clever gentleman an' mighty innocent; but I'd ask ye just this: D'ye mind somethin' that happened about three years ago in a place called Inishrath? Eh?"

"Perfectly."

"Ye do. An' yet ye have the face to stand there askin' me why I keep an eye on ye? You," said Ted, between his teeth, "that did your endeavours

against me, that turned a girl from me an' then flung her there; you ask me that, you that I niver trusted the width o' me nail—an' don't now," cried Ted, "no, not the breadth of a hair." He came closer to Frank. "Ah, why didn't I wring your neck that night when I had the chance?" he said. "Why didn't I knock the divilment out o' ye once for all? 'Twould ha' been God's mercy; 'twould ha' been God's mercy!"

Frank stood firmly on the pavement, hands clasped behind him and a smile on his face.

"Go on," he said. "Please keep on, Mr. Ross."

"Ay. Keep on, You an' your sneers. Ah, ye divil! How can I keep me hands off ye?"

"Don't," answered Frank. "It would be a pity. But remember one thing, Mr. Ross, this is not Inish-rath."

"Ye needn't tell me," said Ted; "an' ye needn't be afraid. The police aren't goin' to lay hands on me because o' you—or till ye give me better cause. But see here." Ted raised his hand. "As God's me judge, an' ye come between me and her again, or try to do her harm, I'll have your blood, Frank Barry! Ye hear me? I say it before God! Ye hear me, I say?"

"Clearly," answered Frank; then stepped and laid his hand on Ted's arm. "Look here, Ted," said he, "don't be a fool, and don't make yourself ridiculous in the streets, even if they do happen to be dark. Man alive, have sense. Don't be a child. Listen to me. You'll never have the pleasure of shedding my blood. I'll never come between you and your girl. I want to be your friend, and hers,

and 'twas just to say so that I asked for a word with you to-night. Look here, my son ;" Frank patted Ted's sleeve ; " try to understand that I've something better in life to do than come poaching on your affairs. I've my own little world to keep spinning, I've my own—"

Frank hesitated. In the impulse of the moment he had almost blurted the secret of wife and home. He paused in some confusion ; recovered himself and went on.

" Never mind about that, however, just now. I've said enough, and you may take it or leave it. But ;" Frank turned to go ; " I'll just add a last word or two. If by any chance you should meet me again, Mr. Ross, please remember that the pavement is public property, and try to treat me as a friend who wishes you nothing but well. Good-night to you." And off marched Frank.

But Ted stood pondering for a while ; then turned and set out in Frank's footsteps. And, as he went, Ted's thoughts were these : You may be my friend, Mr. Frank Barry, and you may wish me well, but I trust you less than ever. What's more, you've made me suspicious of you. What did you mean by your little world ? Why did you stammer and get confused ? Anyhow, maybe it would be no harm just to see what kind of a place you live in, and what number is on the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

THEY were standing on the Victoria Embankment, leaning upon the parapet, and looking out across the river. A strong tide was flowing, sweeping brokenly through the arches, creeping muddily along the wall; like a living thing, sombre, mysterious, sliding along with its harvest of barges for the gaping mouths of Waterloo Bridge, sliding softly and silently. Far above, the evening sky hung pleasantly; beyond, spires, chimneys, great buildings reared up through the haze, looked towards Westminster and caught the glory of the setting sun; from Blackfriars Bridge came the hum of wheel and hoof, and the ceaseless tramp of feet; behind, the cabs and carriages went whirring; now, an engine shrieked, or a steam-whistle came lashing, or a tug-boat went labouring by: the evening was full of life, hope; London, just there and then, was in fairest mood, clean, radiant—a City Beautiful, you might think, smiling upon the gloom of that unresting tide.

They had just met. On Nan's cheek still lingered the first flush of greeting. Clearly, she had made an heroic effort to come and be at her best. She looked neat and fresh, her eyes were bright; as if by magic, Frank thought, she had lost that other haunting look of weariness and hunger. There was a splash

of colour about her throat, a gleam of roses in her hat, a glitter of silver on her wrists. She wore a plain dress and jacket of dark-coloured stuff, and white cotton gloves. A little timid, perhaps, and anxious she was, somewhat reserved, too, in manner and speech; but her eyes were sweet and steady as of old, she held herself with grace and ease; was Nan still, Frank told himself, the old-time Nan.

And Frank seeing her was glad—glad to be near her, to hear her speak, to see her, even for a while, free of the ugly grip of Walworth and standing there beside him with health and hope still in her face. Yes; she was still the old-time Nan. How often had he seen her stand just so; head back a little, eyes down, lips slightly parted. She had changed, of course, gone off, as the vulgarism went; but, after all, how much she was the same. He was glad. Had he seen her the other night, or only her ghost?

He turned, smiling.

“Well; how goes it, Nan?”

“Ah, rightly,” came back; “just rightly.”

“You feel—happier;” Frank paused before the word; “than you did last time we met?”

Nan reddened.

“Ah, I was a fool that night. I dunno what ailed me. I was a fool. To think I must carry on like that! Ah, I could have whipped meself when I got home.”

Frank laughed.

“Whipped yourself, Nan. And why, may I ask? Just because you were tired, and hungry, and had met an old friend?”

Nan beat her foot on the pavement.

"Ah, don't talk of it," cried she; "don't ask me! Like a school girl I was, wi' me feelin's in me lap. But never again, please God; never again. Ah, let's talk o' somethin' else. Lord, but it's the fine evenin'," said Nan, and strove for the commonplace; "ah, but it is."

Frank looked curiously at her for a moment.

"Yes, Nan, It's a splendid evening. Doesn't it all remind you," said Frank, with a wave of his hand, "of old scenes and old times—the whole look of things—the freshness—the sky—the bigness—ourselves standing here enjoying it all? Eh, Nan? Doesn't it strike you so? Can't you imagine yourself just now on the shores of Inishrath?"

Nan shook her head.

"Naw," she answered slowly; "I can't. Inishrath? Ah, no, no. There's no place in all the world like that."

"None at all, Nan?"

"Not one."

"And why?"

Nan glanced at Frank.

"Why?" she said. "Why, because of everything that's happened in it; because of all I think about it; because mebbe thinkin' of it keeps me alive sometimes. Ah, there's scores of reasons," said Nan; "scores an' scores of them."

"Do I make one?" asked Frank.

Nan looked him full in the eyes.

"You?" she said, deliberately. "You!"

"Yes. I."

Hardly for a moment did Nan hesitate; then, in a voice just as level as Frank's own:

"There's no one in the world could tell ye that better than yourself, Mr. Barry;" and Frank was answered.

But not silenced. He laughed in his pleasant way, said he was served right; then twisted round with his back to the parapet.

"But you'll admit at least, Nan," said he, "that London has some attractions, some perfections?"

"Ah, it has. I suppose it has."

"You suppose? Tell me, Nan: Do you remember a talk we had one day, long ago, out among the heather, when you asked me about London, and I told you?"

"Just as well as if 'twas only yesterday—just as well."

"Yes? And was I right or wrong, now that you've seen for yourself?"

"'Twas a fine piece o' romancin'," answered Nan, after a pause. "'Twas like describin' a meadow by tellin' only about the daisy-heads, an' havin' no word at all for the grass an' the weeds."

"Meaning, that I described all this?" Frank waved an arm. "And neglected all that?" Frank looked towards the Surrey side.

"I do," said Nan.

"And did I romance even about the daisies, Nan?" asked Frank, still with that half-smile playing on his face.

"Naw. Mebbe not. But I'm little of a judge. I've been back there;" Nan turned her face towards the West-end; "once or twice with—with—"

"Ted?" said Frank.

"Yes, with Ted." Nan flushed slightly. "An'

surely it's the grandest place in all the world. It's wonderful. But sure it's not for the likes of us. 'Twas like as if ye put me to walk the street in a silk dress. I was just like a fly in a beehive, bewildered an' out o' me place. Ah, no. It isn't grandeur that the people livin' over there'll be needin'," said Nan, a little bitterly, and stood looking across the river towards Walworth. "Indeed it isn't."

"You don't like Walworth, Nan?"

"Like it? A place like that?" she answered, fiercely. "A dirty, ungodly hole like that! Ah, Lord, but I hate it—but I hate it. Think o' the streets, the dirt an' ugliness o' them. Think o' the pig-crows that people live in. Think o' the people themselves; the women—ah, Lord, the women! an' the childer, the dirty, God-forsaken childer, with only hunger an' death in their wee faces; and think o' the men, with their drink, an' their cursin', an' their dogs' manners. Ah, it's woeful," cried Nan, with flaming cheeks; "it's woeful. An' to think we've all got to live in it, right in the middle of it, an' see an' hear an' endure iverything! An' then to think of—" Nan paused; stood looking fixedly at the water.

"Inishrath," Frank ventured.

"Ay, of Inishrath—of all, all that we've left an' lost—lost for ever. Ah, my God, but it's hard to think of it! An' to lose it all in such a way, all through—" Again Nan paused.

"Through carelessness was it, Nan? Or bad luck? Or the landlords?"

"Ah, landlords, an' bad luck!" came back, scorn-

fully. "What had they to do with it? Ah, poor father; sure I pity him. He can't help himself. It's his nature. But, Lord alive, if he was only back again—only back! He's ruinin' himself. Ah, Mr. Barry," said Nan, and turned almost beseechingly to Frank; "what d'ye think? Is there any hope for him at all? Is there?"

What could Frank answer? He pondered a moment; then, without speaking, took Nan by the arm, led her across the pavement to a seat, and there sat down beside her.

"It's not for me to judge your father, Nan," said he. "I pity more than I blame him. But tell me about him," said Frank, turning to face Nan; "tell me about everything."

And Nan, sitting there beneath the young green of the plane trees, the dusk gathering around her, and the great pulse of London throbbing in her ear, told him about John; then, in her simple way, and in answer to Frank's subtle questioning, went on telling him about Sarah, and the ways of life in Walworth, and of life as it was ordered in that dingy East Street home.

It made doleful hearing; even though in every word Frank was quick to detect the note of false hope and assumed cheerfulness with which Nan strove to relieve the utter badness of things. It was just like her, he thought; she was of the kind who die rather than ask favours or admit even the smallest need of them. "Ah, but sure things will mend." . . . "Ah, but what could you expect, an' we only strangers." . . . "Now, we've little to grumble at; sure, there's millions worse." . . . "Some day soon, father'll get

work, an' then we'll be right comfortable, so we will." Constantly were phrases like these cropping out in Nan's talk; and in no wise did she alter her tone when, presently, she yielded to Frank's solicitations and began speaking of herself and her affairs.

She had to work hard, to be sure, but so had most people; had long hours, but no longer than had another; had nothing to boast of in the matter of wages, but sure she was only a beginner. Yes; the workroom was comfortable enough, a little crowded maybe, and the air none too sweet, and the company hardly what she was used to: for all that, was comfortable enough. No; she didn't make companions of any of the girls. Some of them she disliked, some disliked her, a few were friendly and she liked them well: but what place had she to take friends to and what to offer them—at least, not just yet, added Nan hastily and dropped her eyes. No; she seldom went out after she got home; she felt tired maybe, or there was something to be done, or 'twas too late. Ah yes; she'd been to the theatre, once at Christmas time with Ted, and once at Easter time with her father. She had enjoyed herself: the pantomime had been powerful. No; she had never had a holiday, not one: but sure 'twas time enough yet to be thinking of such things. Ah, her health kept splendid, thank God. London suited her that far well enough. Ay; maybe she did look pale at times; who didn't, shut up always in a big city? Surely she had her dinner in the middle of the day. The idea of going without that! Didn't she take something with her; and didn't they all send out for things; and wasn't there tea provided at a penny a cup? No; she had

no more than the cup of tea between dinner and supper; what more did she want? Sure she was home never later than eight o'clock, and there was mostly something ready; and, at a pinch, wasn't there always bread and cheese in the house and plenty of tea?

Frank could listen no longer. One word seemed only more piteous than the other; seemed to bring clearer before him, and closer, the picture of that other Nan, with wan face and weary eyes and lips trembling below her shabby black glove. He leant towards her.

"Nan," he said, "don't tell me any more. I hate to hear of this life you're leading. It's all wrong. You're not fit for it, Nan. It will kill you. No wonder you looked pale and tired the other night."

"Ah, yes," murmured Nan, with a shake of her head.

"You're not fit for it at all, I say," Frank went on. "You were made for better things. Think of drudging like that all day long, without proper food, or air, or company!"

"Ah, yes," said Nan again. "Sure it's easy to say that."

"I know it is, Nan. . . Tell me, do you remember a talk we had together, one day, when I spoke on this very point? You were working at the turf and I was trying to help. You remember, Nan, don't you?"

"Remember? It's not the word. It might have happened only an hour ago." Nan sat pulling softly at a finger of her glove. "'Twas the same day, I'm

thinkin’,” she added, raising her eyes, “that ye told me about London.”

Frank winced. The rebuke was merited. Nan was right. He had romanced that day; right and left gone switching only the daisy-heads. For a while he sat tapping his stick against his boot; then leant again towards Nan.

“It’s true,” he said; “the reproach is deserved. I’ve been all words, words from the first day you ever saw me. I’ve done nothing for you—nothing but bring you trouble. My God,” cried Frank, “what did I not do that was unworthy? Nan Butler, I wonder you can bear to sit there beside me. How can you look at me, even, and not scorn me? I sneaked away—you chose me, Nan, and I sneaked away! What did you think of me;” cried Frank, “when you found me out? What do you think of me now?”

Nan sat bent forward, fingers twining restlessly in her lap and her eyes fixed upon them. She looked very pale now, and her breath came quick. Again came the words: “What do you think of me?” She shook her head.

“Ah, I dunno,” she moaned; “I dunno. ’Twas strange. I hardly knew what to think. ’Twas strange. I didn’t expect—Ah, but no matter. I can’t talk about it. I can’t.”

“But I must,” said Frank; “I must.”

“Ah, no—not now. Whisht! They’ll hear ye,” said Nan, and looked timidly at the tramp or two, and the straggler or two, that showed dimly in the lamp-light here and there on the pavement.

“Let them,” said Frank, bending nearer. “I don’t

care. I must explain. Listen to me, Nan. I swear to you that I never tried to come between you and Ted. I did my best to keep away from you. I told you the truth that night—”

“Ah, don’t, don’t,” pleaded Nan. “What’s the use o’ sayin’ it?”

“But I must, Nan; I must. I told the truth, I say, that night. I went meaning to say good-bye. But you chose me; and I came away without saying it. I couldn’t. And I was glad, Nan. I felt another man as I crossed the lake and went up the road. I said over and over: *She loves, loves me.* . . . And yet, all the time, I knew it was hopeless. I had to go, Nan. I had to say: *I must see her no more, not even to say good-bye.* . . . But, crossing the lake, I saw you. You were standing on the pier with a can in your hand; and the sight of you nearly maddened me. You seemed to be calling me. But I fought myself; went away. And all along the road you seemed to be calling me, and I felt a coward, and my heart was sore: and at last I gave way and turned back. I couldn’t go without seeing you. . . . Nan, how was it you didn’t hear me calling? I was sure you would come to the ferrying.”

Nan looked up quickly.

“Ye called me?” she said. “Ye called me an’ I never heard! An’ ye turned back to see me,” said Nan eagerly; “came back all that way?”

“Yes, Nan. I had to. . . . Then I ran along the shore; found an old cot, took my life in my hand and crossed. I didn’t care. I had to go. . . . And I was too late. The house was dark. I didn’t know what to do. At last—” Frank stopped; looked

steadily at Nan ; went on. "Nan, I don't know if I may dare speak to you about that night. You—you remember, don't you ?"

"Ah, don't ask me. Don't ask me. Could I ever forget it !"

"And I may speak about it?" Frank said, speaking slowly and with his eyes quick on Nan's face.

She looked at him, fully and as innocently as might a child.

"May?" she repeated. "An' why do ye ask me that? Is it that ye think I blamed ye for comin'? Is it that ye think I blame ye now, after all you've said? . . . Ah, if I'd only known," moaned Nan; "if I'd only known!"

"Known what, Nan?"

"Why, that you'd come back all that journey—that ye wanted to say good-bye—that I mightn't see ye again. But sure I didn't know. Ye never said. I thought ye were only half in earnest. I thought," said Nan, with half a smile, "that mebbe we both could well wait till the morrow."

Frank hid his eyes behind his hand.

"Yes?" he said. "And what would you have done, Nan, had you only known?"

"I'd have come down to ye in spite of the world."

"You would? Really, Nan?"

"I would surely. Don't ye know it? Ah, but I was to blame. Ah, but I blamed myself afterwards. He's gone, I used to think, an' he wanted to say good-bye; he pleaded an' pleaded, an' I wouldn't hear him! An' now he's gone for ever. . . . Ah, if I'd only known!"

Then Frank clutched her arm.

"Nan," he said; "I swear to Heaven that if you'd said the word that night I would have stayed. You remember what I said? I put myself in your hands. I said: Ask me to stay, Nan, and I'll stay. And you didn't Nan. You didn't understand."

"Ah, I know," cried Nan, with a sob. "Don't tell it to me; don't tell it to me."

"So I came away," Frank went on. "I waited a while, thinking I might see you again; but you never came. Oh, but I felt miserable and—" Frank stopped; let his hand slide off Nan's arm. Why tell her how he had felt, how guilty and miserable and ashamed? She would not understand: thank Heaven for that. "So I came away, Nan," he repeated. "And that was three years ago. And now here we are."

"Ah, yes," said Nan. "Ah, yes indeed."

Frank moved away from her; and the two sat silent, there beneath the plane trees, their faces toward the silent river and their eyes looking steadily out into the dim mysteries of the night. Nan's lips were trembling, tears were near her eyes; over and over she kept repeating to herself: *If I'd only known*. Frank's face was grave. It was time, he told himself, to speak seriously. Heaven knew what foolishness might come did he wake many more memories of far-off, poignant things. He must speak of those old times and doings no more. For himself it were foolish; for Nan cruel. Nothing could come of such talk. He had explained enough, indulged sentiment and emotion too much; it was time to talk seriously.

"Well, Nan;" Frank leant back in the seat;

"there's no use moaning over things now. Not a bit. Perhaps we've made a mess of things, perhaps not; perhaps, after all, we're just as well." Nan sat silent and very still. "One never knows," Frank continued. "I daresay it has all been willed for us, all arranged and settled, ages ago, by Providence. I was to do so and so; you were to do so and so—" Frank turned. "I wonder what your fate is, Nan? Eh?" Nan sat biting her lip; she only shook her head. "Shall I guess, then?" Frank appeared to consider. "Well, I vote for Ted—yes, certainly I do. Come. Am I right, Nan?" Still no answer. Frank kept on. "I believe I am. I'm sure of it; and I'm very glad. There's no better fellow than Ted in all London. Not one. I have the greatest admiration for him—"

Nan turned, with flashing eyes.

"It'll be lately, then, Mr. Barry," said she, "that ye took to admirin' him?"

"Well, yes; perhaps it is," returned Frank.

"An' why have ye altered your opinion, may I ask?"

"Why? Oh, for many reasons, Nan. I've heard about him, you know; about the way in which he left Ireland, for instance, and followed you all to London; about his untiring devotion, too——"

"An' who's been tellin' ye all this?" said Nan.

"Oh, one and another; people who know, I think. But all that matters little. Really, Nan, I can't help admiring him. He's a man in a thousand—and," said Frank, with studied abruptness, "I congratulate you, Nan. As I said, there's no worthier fellow, I believe——"

"Ah, spare your beliefs," cried Nan. "Ye congratulate me—ye congratulate me!"

"Am I wrong, then?" asked Frank, with a turn of his head. "Surely my guess isn't wrong?"

"It matters nothin' to ye," cried Nan. "It matters nothin'!"

Things were hardly developing in the way that Frank had hoped. He had meant to be somewhat clumsy, abrupt, but not to the extent of hurting Nan's feelings or of angering herself. He wished only to do his duty—so Frank's thoughts ran, as silently he sat looking at the jumble of lights on the long span of Blackfriars Bridge—to turn Nan's face from himself toward Ted; and here, at the very outset, was she in open rebellion. Of course he understood. She had not come there merely to have Ted's praises sounded in her ear. Still, he must do his duty.

"Very well, then," said he; "I'll say no more, Nan. I'm sorry I blundered so. I apologise—and withdraw my congratulations. All the same, I must continue my admiration for Ted, I fear—and give him my pity, too. Poor chap! He deserves better luck."

Then said Nan:

"He deserves the very best the world can give him. There's not his like in all London. Your pity! An' a lot Ted Ross wants that of ye, Mr. Barry."

Frank looked round.

"There!" said he. "Just what I've been saying myself."

"Ah, yes; what you've been sayin' and not meanin'. D'ye think I don't know?"

"Then I may congratulate you, Nan? You do care for Ted?"

"I care for him more than all the world," answered Nan, defiantly. "He's the best man I ever knew. He's wonderful."

"Ah," said Frank, with a shrug; "I see. Do you mean it; really, Nan?"

"It's not the way with me to say what I don't mean, Mr. Barry."

"No? Well, I'm glad. But how long, may I ask, Nan, have you been feeling for Ted like this?"

"That's my affair, Mr. Barry."

"Yes? Very well, then." Frank paused. "But you'll admit, Nan, that half an hour ago we were not talking quite as we are now."

"No," answered Nan, bitterly; "God knows we weren't. Ah, the fool I was half an hour ago! No matter." Nan rose. "I'll be wiser again. And now I'm goin' home."

Frank caught her sleeve.

"But, Nan, I've got such a lot to say. I had only commenced."

"You've said enough," answered Nan; "an' I've heard. An' I'm goin' home," she said.

"But, Nan——"

"I'm goin' home."

Then Frank rose also.

"Very well," said he, and added to himself: "Maybe it is well, and maybe it's wise to leave well alone."

They went along the Embankment, quickly and silently; crossed Blackfriars Bridge, and took their seats on the outside of a tramcar that presently started for Walworth. Neither spoke much. Nan had nothing to say; Frank a great deal, but thought

it wise not to say it. At intervals, indeed, he remarked on the beauty of the night, the glory of the sky, the grim sordidness of Blackfriars Road, the ugliness of the Obelisk ; in London Road, too, became almost cynical, waving a hand at many a haunt and exhibition of the cheap and nasty, and talking about Marts of the Great Unwashed ; but this was only small talk, the talk at which Frank was something of an adept, but which just then came rather lamely and upon Nan's ear fell unavailingly. She had no wish to speak, none to hear ; she wanted to get home, get home. And at the Elephant and Castle, even as Frank was venturing somewhat about the place and chance of a former meeting, suddenly Nan rose and held out her hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Barry," said she ; "I'm thankful for your company."

"But, Nan!" cried Frank, and went on volubly. He wished to see her home, had something still to say, wanted to arrange about another meeting ; couldn't Nan sit a little longer?

"No."

"But why?"

"I'm expectin' to meet Ted."

"Ah! Very well, then ; I won't try to keep you. But easy ; I must see you down." They left the tramcar and came to the pavement. "Well, good-bye, Nan. My love to Ted. Good-bye and good luck," said Frank ; then waved a hand, raised his hat, and saying to himself that perhaps it was all just as well, set out for Kennington.

But Nan turned for Walworth and home ; went hurrying, almost running, face set, eyes big and

bright, her brain a whirl of burning thoughts. "Ah, the fool I was," she thought; "the fool. . . Why did I ever go; why did I ever see him? . . . The way he changed, the way he talked. Ah, but he's changed! . . . Why did I ever go? The fool I was. But never again—never—never! I hate him; I hate him! Ah, but he's changed . . . Ah, Frank, Frank! . . . Ah, Ted, Ted; Ted, me son!"

A night or two afterwards, Ted Ross, not for the first time, was loitering on the pavement of Camberwell New Road. Up and down he went, backwards and forwards; presently, at sight of a light flashing up behind the windows of a certain house, crossed the road, turned on the curbstone and stood watching. The blinds were up, the table laid; one by one a little party gathered in the room. First, came a woman, tall and handsome; then, an elderly man, grey-haired and slightly stooped; then, a tiny old lady, dressed in black satin, and carrying a curly-headed child; then, a tall, lean man, with long arms and a solemn face; last of all, in his light summer clothes, Frank Barry himself.

Ted whistled softly; shifted a step that he might have fuller view. The party gathered by the fireplace; made a group before the old lady, and began playing with the child. The windows were down and Ted could hear their voices. Their ways to him appeared strange and foolish (afterwards, when recalling the scene, he could only laugh at the awkward gestures of the solemn-faced man, and at the absurd antics of him with the snowy hair); but it was on the ways of the tall lady, and of Frank Barry,

that Ted kept his most watchful eye. They stood side by side, faces aglow and their eyes rapt in admiration of the boy. Now Frank clapped his hands, now shook his curls, now turned towards the tall lady and laughed; now (and here you can imagine Ted watching his keenest) took her hand and led her closer to the old lady. There is a hush. The two hold out their hands and appear to plead. The child looks from one to another; suddenly stretches its arms, and with a cry of "Father's boy," is carried to Frank's shoulder and borne in triumph round the room. There is a minute of riot, a great noise of crowing and hand-clapping; then, a scattering of the group, the face of the tall lady at the window, and down come the blinds.

But Ted, in that little while—so short that a crowd of not more than five, including Ted himself, saw the blinds drawn—had seen and heard enough. He was no longer suspicious; he knew. It was great. With a light as of victory broad on his face, he hurried off for Walworth and East Street.

The Butlers were supping on bread and tea, when, with a rush, Ted carried the door of their little room. He strode to the table, laid his hands upon it and leant forward.

"Listen," he cried; "listen to me! D'ye know what I've found out? Listen. Frank Barry's married. He's a wife and child. He lives in a big house over Camberwell way. I know it," cried Ted, with a thump on the table. "I know it. I've seen him. . . ."

Like news of death the words fell among the Butlers. With a crust half-way to his mouth, John

sat staring at Ted; Sarah's face was grey with surprise; Nan shrank back in her chair, taking each word as if it were a blow.

"I've seen him," Ted went on, vehemently. "I've found the devil out. The purest chance it was. There was a whole party o' them there—uncles an' aunts, an' sorrow knows who. Listen to me. I was wanderin' up an' down—But wait," said Ted; "give me a drink, for God's sake. I'm parched. Anything, anything; tay or beer, anything at all. . . . That's better. Now, where's there a chair till I tell ye."

So Ted told; and there at the supper-table, John and Sarah sat listening, hanging on every word, drawing deep breaths of astonishment, breaking in occasionally with question or comment. Only, Nan spake never a word, made never a move. Her heart was like lead. It was all true. She knew it was. This explained everything, ended everything. Ah, to think it; to think he could do that and never tell her! How could he do it? Married—married—married these years! And all that time she had waited and waited. Oh, she must get away.

Hurriedly Nan rose, crossed to that inner room, and there on her knees by her bedside wept bitterly. And there on her knees she put away the old dreams and hopes, put them away utterly; then rose and went back to the supper-table, a new Nan with a new face thenceforward for Ted.

So that night passed: and the next day Sarah pinned on her dingy shawl, tied on her bonnet of black, and set out to pay Frank Barry another visit. But Frank happened to be from home when Sarah called; so she saw Marian.

CHAPTER IX.

It was nearly eight o'clock that evening when Frank reached home. There was no light in the dining-room, the house was very still ; he ran up-stairs to the study, there found Marian at her work-table, sewing by the light of a shaded lamp. She looked up as he entered, then bent again over her needle.

"Hello, Marian. How quiet you are to-night. I half thought you must be out." He kissed her ; turned and threw himself into an arm-chair. "Oh, I am tired. Where's the boy?"

"He went to bed early," answered Marian, without looking up.

"Bless him. Oh, I am tired. Such a day I've had of it. And, by Jove, I am hungry. Hope you've something substantial for supper, my dear," said Frank, looking round. "But what's the matter, Marian? You look pale—worried. Is anything wrong? You're sure the boy's all right?"

"Oh, yes ; the boy's quite right."

"Then, what's the matter? Come ; tell me."

Marian made a stitch or two ; raised her eyes. She was very pale.

"Someone called to see you this afternoon," she said.

"Oh. On business, or what? Who was it?"

"It was a woman," answered Marian, speaking

slowly. "She gave her name as Mrs. Butler." Frank twisted in his chair, sat staring at Marian. "She inquired for you, and finding you out asked to see me." Marian paused and made a stitch. Frank's face was like ashes.

"And—and you saw her?" he asked, brokenly, hoarsely.

"Yes; I saw her. I had to see her; and to listen."

Marian went on stitching. With an effort, Frank controlled himself; then rose and stood with his back to the fireplace, shoulders drooping and his hands clutched behind him.

"Well?" said he. "Go on, Marian. What did Mrs. Butler have to say for herself?"

"Must I say?"

"Why, of course. If she said anything—Why, of course you must."

Frank stood swaying to and fro, his face ghastly, lips tremulous. Whilst you might count ten Marian paused.

"She told me—" Down went Marian's hands. She flushed, sat upright, raised her eyes. "Oh, Frank," she cried, "it's not true—it's not true what that abominable woman forced me to hear? Tell me it isn't; tell me! You haven't been untrue to me, Frank—you didn't do those things in Ireland—you didn't deceive me—you haven't been deceiving me?" cried Marian, so piteously. "Oh, tell me, Frank; tell me you haven't!"

Now that he knew the worst, Frank's courage came creeping back. He steadied himself; as best he might, braced himself for the ordeal. It had come at last, that oft-time dreaded hour. Marian knew all,

knew worse than all; was sitting there with an eternity of piteous doubt in her eyes and ringing in her voice. "Oh, tell me," it came again; "tell me you haven't." What was he to answer? In God's name, what was he to answer? Slowly, unsteadily, the words came.

"So that's what she told you? That's what you've heard about me? It's—it's a lie," spoke Frank, suddenly and fiercely. "The woman's a liar. I've never done such things. I've never been untrue to you, Marian. She's a liar, I say. It's blackmail, blackmail. She owes me a grudge. She's paying me out. It's all lies, lies. I never deceived you. I swear, Marian, I never did. I only—only—"

It was of no avail. He was in the toils. On every side were deeps and pitfalls. Even to himself his words rang hollow and false. Before him sat Marian, the very image of distrust. For a breath or two he hesitated; then flung himself on his knees at Marian's side and broke into a panic of pleading, confession, remorse.

"Forgive me, Marian," he cried, with a clutch at her arm. "Oh, my dear, my dear! I should have told you long ago; I tried to tell you; I was weak, weak. But you'll forgive me, Marian—ah, my dear, my dear!"

Marian sat like stone; hands in her lap, needle in her fingers, eyes rigid on the lamp.

"I've been to blame, terribly to blame; I know it. I've done foolish things. But Marian, Marian;" again Frank caught her arm; "listen to me. I've not been so bad as that woman made out. I can explain. She hates me. She's told you lies. I know she has.

Listen, Marian. I've never been untrue to you; before God, I swear it. I was weak, foolish. I—I was tempted once, but I did nothing. I've deceived you, I know; I've been thoughtless, unkind: but never have I done *that*; never. You believe me, Marian? Speak to me; speak."

Still Marian sat like stone, looking at the lamp.

"Ah, say you believe me!"

No answer; none. Frank threw up his hands.

"Ah, how cold you are; how hard! I want to confess. I can explain. Won't you speak, Marian? Ask me. Ask me anything. See;" Frank spread his arms; "I want to tell you. I'll hide nothing at all. Only give me the chance; give me the chance."

Then Marian turned.

"Chance," she said. "Chance? Now—now you ask that. After all these years!" Her voice was hard; her face like marble. "You want to confess? You'll hide nothing? Now you tell me that; now when I'm insulted, when I know, now when you can't help it! You are false to me for years—false!" cried Marian. "Oh, great heavens, what am I to think? What am I to do? That it should be true—that it should be true!"

"But it's not true," cried Frank. "You don't know all, Marian. I'm not so bad. She has lied, I tell you. I haven't done all you think; I know I haven't. I swear to you I have never been untrue."

"Oh, spare me that," said Marian, and closed her eyes, and turned away, and shuddered; "and spare your protestations. Don't, don't. And don't kneel there before me. I can't bear to see you. Oh, that it should come to this!" For a minute she sat silent;

then, even as Frank drew away and leaning his arm on the work-table knelt looking at her, flashed round in her chair. "Ah," she said, "it can't be! How can I believe it? Of you; of you! Tell me it isn't true. Say it, Frank."

What was Frank to answer? A whole world he would have given, at that moment, for the power to look Marian in the eyes and tell her it was not true. But he was guilty. Nemesis had overtaken him. Again he crept to his wife's side.

"It's no use, Marian," he said. "I can't lie to you. But listen, dear," he went on, as with a moan Marian turned away; "let me tell you. I'm not so very bad, maybe," said Frank; then quickly began again the long story of confession and explanation.

Glibly, earnestly, sometimes passionately, he spoke; and not untruthfully. Marian had heard the account of an enemy; now let her hear his. What had passed in Ireland he was ashamed of. He had been miserably weak; he deserved punishment; but he had fought himself, had always kept sacred his promises to Marian. It was a miserable entanglement, no more. Let him tell about it, from beginning to end.

Then, coming to other and more recent happenings, Frank left Ireland and came to London. Here, too, he had done things of which he was ashamed. But all through weakness; his cursed weakness. He had meant well, and had acted ill; had started by deceiving Marian and been forced to continue deceiving her. He had been so afraid of wrecking their happiness. Only for that fear he would have confessed all to Marian long ago. Would to God he

had done so and saved her this indignity. But farther than deception he had done no ill. This girl was really in a sorry plight. He had tried to help her, to help her people; had only seen her with that object, had only seen her twice, meant never to see her again. And, really, if Marian did but know, she would pity her. The most hard-working, deserving, patient —

Marian flung her work upon the table and rose.

"Oh," said she, "enough, enough. Spare me her praises, please, and have done with this folly." She took a step towards the door. "Do you think I'm a fool," she said, "that you must try to insult my intelligence as well as myself? Your help! My pity!"

"But, Marian," cried Frank; "Marian, my dear! Insult you—"

"Your help," said Marian again, just as if Frank had not spoken. "Your help!" she repeated scornfully; then turned with blazing eyes. "I don't believe you," she said, deliberately; and again, "I don't believe you."

With the blood quick in his face, Frank rose and stepped back to the hearth; there stood, his hands behind him and his eyes meeting Marian's. He had finished now, he told himself; done his best, and failed. The inevitable was coming; let it come. He knew Marian; knew what to expect when she stood like that, hands clenched, eyes glittering, those two narrow lines showing in her forehead.

So Frank, possessing himself in silence, stood back; whilst Marian, now thoroughly roused, spoke the truth that was in her, and spoke it without stint,

bitterly, indignantly, with sudden flashes of scorn and bursts of passion. That she should so speak, even with Frank standing there penitent and defenceless, even though all the right was on her side and all the wrong admittedly on his, was, as Frank himself thought, inevitable; just as it was inevitable, in the natural reaction and stress of thought and feeling, that she should now believe more than was true of Frank and his misdeeds, and express her beliefs recklessly, and say things she must afterwards regret.

Naturally of a jealous disposition, quick in temper too, and, when roused, hot of heart and tongue, very decided also in her opinions, and something of the Puritan in her outlook on the broad domains of right and wrong, Marian was not of those who suffer wrong gladly or hide trouble within the gates of silence; most certainly was she not the woman to take lightly wrongs such as those of Frank's and give them quick forgiveness. Rather, did they wound her to the heart, and stir the depths of her nature to overflowing. That Frank should be guilty of such conduct, Frank her husband, whom she loved dearly and in whom she had trusted, the man she had chosen and been so happy with all these years; that he should do these things, seemed to her terrible, and brought certainly the bitterest pang she had ever felt. Excuse them? How could she. Forgive them? Oh, impossible. In another she must have detested them; in her husband they were almost abhorrent. This plea of weakness, this talk of drifting, of thoughtlessness, and all the rest; what more did these avail than to make matters

worse. Weakness? She had no mercy for it. Deceit, lies? She scorned them in her heart. The thought that Frank had only professed his love, had gone secretly from her in quest of another; the thought was maddening. She seemed to be in hell, a hell of lies and deceit.

"I don't believe you," she cried. "I believe you are as false now as you have always been. Your weakness and thoughtlessness; your talk of pity and help! As if these excused you," cried Marian; and remorselessly went on. As if anything excused him. Now when she knew all, when he was found out, he asked her to believe him and forgive him. Forgive him; and for what? Because he got entangled once, and was entangled still; because he wanted to help, and his wife to pity, the daughter of a washerwoman! To help her? Oh, a pretty story! To help the woman who chose him in Ireland, and waited three years for him; the woman for whom, night after night, he left his wife and went skulking the streets; the woman whose praises he had sounded in a book, the woman who only a day ago had believed him unmarried. Oh, a pretty story!

"I don't believe a word of it; not a word. . . Oh, my God, that it should come to this! The deceit, the lies, the faithlessness. . . . Oh, it's bewildering. I don't know where to look, or what to think. I can't think. . . That you should do this," cried Marian; "you—you!" Think of the letters he had written to her, the long passionate letters from Ireland, written in the toils and sweets of this entanglement. Think of the warmth of his greeting that spring day three years ago; and think of the ardour

of his parting only two nights before, that night when he had stood so nobly pleading in a garden patch. Think of the way he had deceived her, then—and then—and then; of the blackness of his deceit during the past few months, of the lies he had told about his book, about that abominable woman and her visit, about everything, everything.

"It's all false. I don't know where to look, or what to think. I can't think. . . . And that you should do this; you that I trusted so implicitly and thought the one man in the world! Oh, is it true; is it true? I don't know where to look. I can't think. . . . And all," cried Marian, in a sudden frenzy of jealousy and anger; "all for a slattern of the slums! You leave *me* to go to her! You dare even to look at me after that. . . . Perhaps she is waiting for you now, still trusting in your help, still believing you unmarried. Don't let me keep you," said Marian, sweeping her skirts aside and pointing towards the door; "please, don't let me keep you from her. Go. Go. Who am I? Who am I?"

This was more than Frank, guilty though he was and loth to face the storm, could bear. Quickly he stepped forward, answered Marian straight and bitterly; then gave her word for word, scorn for scorn, taunt for taunt, through a long and terrible scene. It was pitiable. Nothing paltry or wretched was left unsaid; this sentence was an accusation, that a re-crimination; the one was false, ignoble, cruel, the other hard, unjust, pitiless; old wounds were reopened, old graves of unhappy things uncovered; as with poisoned arrow and venomous dart these two stood waging barbaric battle. It was pitiable. Let

us, we at least who respect Marian and are ready to give Frank his due ; who know that they loved each other, and hope that their love may continue ; who know, too, how little an affair of the heart is such a scene, and how much it comes of the unleashing of primal and brutal instincts common to us all : let us just stop our ears and creep away and close the door and pray that the end of it all may be speedy and peaceful.

Hush ! Not yet ; not yet. . . Hush ! There is a lull. Now the storm waxes again : now drops suddenly. . . Again the voices clash. "Oh, this is unbearable," you hear Marian say ; "it's intolerable." Then, "Go, go," cries Frank ; and the next minute Frank is down the stairs and out in the street, and Marian is standing pale and trembling within the study door. Well, thank God it is over ; even if it is not well over.

The street door closed with a clang. Marian turned to her chair, sat down, rested her elbows on the table, and so sitting, with her face in her hands and her eyes on the lamp, gave herself for a while to the thralldom of thought. Altogether calm and self-possessed she seemed now ; hardly did she seem to breathe ; only, now and then her lips moved and her thoughts spoke : "That it should come to this," she said ; and again, "Oh, that it should be so ;" and again, "What am I to do ?" and at last, "No, no ; it is impossible ; never, never. I must do it. There is no other way," said Marian ; then, as if driven by stern resolution, rose quickly, found writing materials, wrote a short letter, enclosed it, inscribed *Frank* on the cover, and taking it with her

passed into the bedroom and laid it on the dressing-table.

A moment she stood looking at the boy, lying peacefully in his cot; a moment seemed to hesitate. "Shall I?" she asked herself; then, saying, "Yes, yes. There is no other way," pulled a trunk across the floor and began packing it. First, the boy's little garments she took from drawer and cupboard and laid in the trunk; then, her own apparel and necessities; then, a few trinkets, baubles (things these that Frank had not given her) and a toy or two from a basket that stood in the corner: last of all, shut down the lid, and leaving the trunk unlocked, dragged it towards the door and left it standing by the wall.

The worst was now over; the Rubicon all but crossed. A slight flush, result part of excitement part of exertion, was on her face, as returning to the study she rang the bell and told the servant to lay supper, and to lay it with the best that was in the house. Only a little more now to do; only to put on hat and cloak; to kiss the boy awake, dress him and wrap him in a shawl; only to tie on her veil, and pull on her gloves, and take the boy in her arms—and all was done.

Still half-asleep, perhaps dimly wondering, the boy lay looking up at her; as if hesitating, Marian stood by the doorway, looking down at the boy. "Shall I?" she said. "Am I right, little Frank?" Not a movement or sign. She bent her head and whispered again: "Shall I? Shall I, little Frank?"

A smile answered her. Tightly she strained the child to her breast; gave a swift look round the

room ; hurried to the study, and there lingered a moment : then, a sob in her throat and her eyes streaming, went down the stairs and out into the night.

CHAPTER X.

ABOUT midnight Frank returned ; ate something in the dining-room ; then turned out the lights, softly went up to the study and sank into a chair—the same chair from which, only four hours before, he had risen to face the storm. Four hours : a mere handful of time gone flitting on wings of misery and change.

Physically, he was very tired ; mentally, had come back refreshed from his wanderings, the fumes of temper spent, the ugly passions of heart and soul crushed out. Already, and very bitterly, he regretted what he had said and done. Why, over and over in those hours on the pavements, he had asked himself, why not have curbed tongue and temper, let Marian have her say, and trusted to Time the Consoler ? That had been wise, and his clear duty to Marian : now fault lay upon fault, and wrong above wrong, in one great heap, a heap that might take weeks, ay, months, to clear away ; one day this, the next day that, whole weary days at last before that giant mound of his misdeeds had bit by bit come crumbling down. Ah, and they would be weary days, he told himself. He knew Marian ; knew how slow she was to forgive, how tardy to see the light. There would be coldness between them, abruptness, long fits of silence, efforts on his side towards explanation and conciliation, repulses on hers because of blind instincts, crooked

reasonings, natural inability to forgive men their trespasses: then, some day, perhaps, a patched-up truce and an uncertain start for brighter ways and days. Still, they must be lived through, these; and for himself he meant to make all reparation in his power, to give Marian every assurance and explanation, to be patient also and forbearing; above all, to strive hard for renewed happiness. These things Frank had vowed; let the gods, said he, prosper their observance; and might the happy end be speedy.

For that night, however, he had vowed and striven enough; let each day, said he, carry its own burden. He lit his pipe, took up a book; tried for a while of quietude. But thought would run riot; that unhappy scene live and act itself before his eyes. Words, taunts, whole passages of sound and fury came whirling back from the wide portal of memory. He closed his eyes and saw Marian scorning him, opened them and there sat she by the lamp in her cold silence; at last, worn out in body and brain, dropped his head and fell asleep.

Dawn had come and the birds were twittering, when, cold and unrefreshed, Frank awoke. Pipe and book lay on the floor; the lamp had burnt out; grey and cheerless the room showed itself in the ghostly light of morning. He shivered, yawned wearily; then pulled off his boots, crept along the landing, entered the bedroom and looked at the bed.

Empty? Frank rubbed his eyes; ran his hand along the counterpane; looked across at the boy's cot; then, with a low whistle of surprise, turned up the gas and stood gazing here and there about the room.

Gone! He saw the trunk standing by the door; went over, lifted the lid and stood eyeing the medley of toys and baubles and garments. Again he looked at the bed; again let his eyes range the room; presently, had sight of the letter lying on the dressing-table, and in a trice had it open. Just a few lines there were:

Dear Frank—When you open this I shall be at mother's. It is the best and only way. I am taking the boy, of course. I have packed some things; please have them sent on to me in the morning. Good-bye. Marian.

Just that, without another word. Over and over, Frank read the letter; peered inside the envelope, scanned the back of the sheet; sat on the edge of the bed and read it again; at last folded it, laid it on the dressing-table, and stood abstractedly watching the haggard face that stared at him from the looking-glass.

"*At mother's,*" he repeated. "*I am taking the boy, of course. . . . Please have them sent on. . . . Good-bye. Marian.*" Gone? Gone with the boy? "*Good-bye. Marian,*" he said; then jerked back his head and broke into a pretence of laughter. A mighty fine piece of comedy it was; and a splendid development, this last, in all truth. Quite on the lines of melodrama things were running. A ghostly dawn—an erring husband—an empty room—a packed trunk—a laconic letter—a missing wife and child—then? What next, asked Frank, in this stirring drama of real life in Camberwell? Ah, what next, indeed, said he; then pulled off his coat and prepared for bed.

For hours he lay tossing and thinking; at last dropped into an uneasy sleep that lasted till the servant came tapping at the door and bringing the usual eight o'clock cup of tea. All to himself he had it that morning; no Marian to share it, no boy to play with spoon and saucer. No Marian and no boy. Did he miss them? he asked himself. The boy most certainly he missed: Marian—well, perhaps after all she had done wisely. A day or two apart would bring no harm; would give Marian time to reflect, and himself an opportunity to pick the best means of approach towards forgiveness. Yes; no doubt she had done wisely. But, said a voice in his ear, suppose Marian to stay away longer than a day or two, to stay away much longer? It is quite possible you know, Frank Barry, said the voice; it would be only what you deserve; Marian is not the woman to go from you without just cause for the going; look at the trunk there by the wall, think of the coldness of that note, the curtneess of her good-bye, of the "Go, go," you shouted last night just before you flung away: think of these things, Frank Barry, and then ask yourself again whether Marian has gone for only a day or two. Eh? went the voice. You think it absurd, do you? You have done nothing dreadful, you say, done nothing outside forgiveness; it is only a freak on her part, the result of an impulse; she will be back to-morrow, you think, perhaps to-day? Very well; but suppose she stays away longer, what then, Frank Barry? You don't know? Well try to know, said the voice; perhaps the trying may do you good.

It was not in Frank's power ever to grapple strenuously with thought or thing; ordinarily he slid

away from the one and avoided the other; but this question of the voice certainly made him appear unusually grave and thoughtful (if nothing more), all the time he was dressing that morning, and whilst he lingered for a while in the cheerless study, and whilst, soon after, he stood, newspaper in hand, beside the breakfast-table. It was spread for two, just as it had always been spread these three years back, with the boy's chair standing beside his own, the shelf covered with a napkin and carrying the little bib and mug. And now, for the first time in three years, he stood waiting for nobody. There was no sound of pattering feet upstairs, no merry cackle of laughter; for that morning at least he must eat and drink in solitude, must do so much penance for his sins. So much? Perhaps more. Well, and if he did? He could endure—no, he could not. He felt lonely already. He missed the boy; missed Marian; missed many things.

The landlady herself came with the breakfast tray; laid it in the usual place, glanced curiously at Frank, and coughed behind her hand. Was Mrs. Barry unwell? she ventured. No, answered Frank, over the edge of his paper; she was quite well. But, he went on, she would not be down to breakfast that morning. The fact was, she had been called in the night to see a sick friend and had not returned. She might be back that day, or not for a few days; in the meantime, he wished Mrs. Smith to manage as best she could for him. "You know what I want, Mrs. Smith," he said with a smile. "I'm simple in my tastes; and you should know them after all these years. Do your best for me."

Himself strove also to make the best of things : with poor success. He had no appetite, felt spiritless, lonely ; constantly kept chasing thought through a blur of type—thought that came pressing whether he would or no. How had Sarah found out ; what had she said ? What of Nan ? What did Marian mean to do ? What was he to do ? thought Frank, and echoed that question of the voice. Should he treat matters lightly, or seriously ? Should he demand Marian's return, or implore it ; or should he simply leave things as they stood, to work out and develop as chance, or Marian, might direct ? Demand ? No. Implore ? Not yet. Leave things, then, to slide and develop ? Perhaps so. Something might happen ; he must not act rashly ; Marian might come back that day, she might write, she might—

“ Oh, confound things,” cried Frank, in his perplexity ; “ confound things ! Why couldn't she believe me ? Am I worse than other men ? Would she have me a saint ? I confessed all, explained ; and she has left me ! Well then ? It is her own choice. Am I to go pleading and begging ? No. Not a word shall I say. Of her own will she went ; so must she come back. . . . Yet I ought to go. And I miss her so—and the boy—and everything. Shall I ? Shall I not ? Yes, I'll go,” said Frank ; and, in a minute, “ No I won't, I'll wait.”

The morning wore on. Upstairs, in the study, Frank sat trying to work ; knitting his brows, striving vainly to untwine thoughts of present things from thoughts of other things. The house was strangely still ; hollow and gloomy as a tomb, it seemed. Now and again he threw down his pen,

hurried into the bedroom, flung up the window and looked eagerly along the pavement towards Liepsic Road. Constantly he kept pulling out his watch, turning his head as if listening for a step or a knock; once he took down his hat, held it a moment, hurriedly hung it again. This moment he seemed deep in thought; the next in the pangs of irresolution; the next was driving an unwilling pen.

About eleven o'clock, came a quick knock at the street door; and at sound of it Frank rose and stood biting his lip. Hush! There is a voice: but whose? Now there is a step on the stairs; now it is on the landing; now the door opens and the Mother comes in, her face anxious, her eyes bright. Not a moment she wasted. Hardly did she touch Frank's hand.

"Frank," she said, still striving for breath, "what's all this? Why has Marian come home? What has come between you?"

Frank hung a moment on his answer.

"Ah, that's the question," he said; then, looking at the Mother: "Hasn't she told you?"

"Not a word. Oh, she's so strange, so strange," cried the Mother, with a shake of her ringlets. "I dare not ask her. I've never seen her like this before. Never. She's hard, hard—and cold. Frank, what is it?"

Frank shook his head.

"If Marian won't say, mother, then I can't. No. Besides, 'twould be of no use. Not a bit. Better let it rest between ourselves. . . . But don't be worrying, mother," said Frank. "You mustn't. All will come right in the end."

"Ah, but will it, Frank? Will it? I don't like this, Frank. It's terrible. I can't bear to look at Marian. . . . Frank, tell me. Is it anything very serious?"

"It seems so. Yes, it is."

"And, Frank, who's to blame?"

"Oh, I, of course," answered Frank, with a smile. "Ah, you little knew, mother," he went on, "the reprobate you were taking into the family. She's quite right, quite right. No matter. How's the boy?"

The Mother clutched Frank's sleeve; stood looking up into his face.

"Frank," she said; "tell me. It's nothing dreadful has happened, is it?"

"Well, that depends," answered Frank. "Marian thinks it is; I think—it's not."

"Tell me," persisted the Mother, her hand trembling on his sleeve, her voice piteous; "tell me, Frank. There's no—no sin? Oh, say it."

"No. There's none, mother."

"Oh, thank God—thank God!"

"I swear it to you," Frank went on. "I've been weak and foolish: but nothing more. I swear it."

"Thank God," sighed the Mother again. "And Marian knows?"

"I've told her. She knows everything. But she doesn't believe me. She said—ah, it was a terrible business," said Frank; "terrible. And I deserved it all. You see, she found me out, mother."

"I understand. And you did your best to explain?"

"My utmost, my very utmost. And 'twas no use; none. She still believes—oh, God knows," cried Frank, "what she doesn't believe."

"I understand," said the little Mother, and stood with her hands folded, looking towards the window. "I quite understand. And what do you mean to do?" she asked, in a while.

Slowly came Frank's answer:

"I don't know."

"But you should know, Frank."

"Yes? What should I do, then?"

"Come to her," answered the Mother. "This must not be. Frank, it must not. It's terrible. You and Marian! Frank," she cried, seeing him shake his head; "you must come. It's your duty." She laid her hand on his arm. "You will, Frank?"

"She went of her own accord," answered Frank. "I came back and found her gone. That was all I found." He held out Marian's note. "Read it."

"No, no," said the Mother. "I understand; quite. But she must come back. You must speak. It's your duty, Frank."

"Duty?" said Frank. "And has she none?"

"Yes, yes." Gently the Mother pulled at Frank's sleeve. "Come back with me," she pleaded. "Ah, Frank, Frank."

He pondered a moment; then spread his arms.

"What's the good? She said she hated me," he cried. "Hated me! And she does. No, I can't."

"You must, Frank."

"No. It's wisest to wait. Not now."

"It's not wisest, Frank. The longer you wait the harder it will be. Oh, I know it," cried the Mother,

from the depths of her sage experience. Again she plucked at Frank's sleeve. "I beg of you, Frank."

A while he stood irresolute, with the Mother's hand on his arm, and her eyes hard on his face; suddenly crossed the room and took down his hat.

"All right," said he. "Come along."

Together they started; went silently along Camberwell New Road, came to the corner of Liepsic Road, and there the Mother stopped.

"I'll go on, Frank," she said, "and see Marian. She doesn't know I've been to see you. She might—Come in presently."

"Very well," said Frank. "Don't explain, and don't be afraid," he added, smiling; "I'll surely come."

The Mother hurried off. Frank lingered some minutes along the pavement; then turned through the green gate, knocked, and was shown by Rose, the servant, into the little parlour.

He crossed to the French window, opened it and stood looking down the garden. He felt strangely nervous. He half wished he had not come. What should he say to Marian? How would she receive him? . . . How quiet the house was! Where was the boy?

He sat down and let his eyes range the room. How orderly everything was and clean, each chair exactly in its place, the pictures so accurately hung and tilted, the clock twenty minutes fast, the books standing like soldiers at drill, labelled, numbered, stamped, as it were, with the image of the Dad's personality. . . . But where were they all? Did they

know he had come? Should he ring? No. Better wait a little longer.

This was the Dad's favourite room. It was easily seen. Dear, harmless, deluded old fellow. The vain dreams of vain things he must have dreamt here; of his career, of that impossible golden future, of the rewards that assuredly waited him, some day, somehow, somewhere. What a strange nature. Always hoping, always hiding the light with the mists of delusion. Yet who so lovable, generous, single-minded? . . . How still the house was. Hush! Someone was coming down the stairs. Strange to be standing like that waiting for his own wife!

It was the Mother who came, her face grave again, her eyes troubled. Quickly she crossed.

"Frank," she said, "it's no use. I can't understand her. She says not now—not now. She blames me, I can see, for going to see you. She thinks, perhaps, you ought to have come sooner, or of yourself—"

Frank raised his hand.

"That's quite enough," he said; "it's just as I expected. No matter. Where's the boy?"

"But Frank, Frank——"

"I want to see the boy."

"He's asleep. Better not, Frank; not now. Ah, my boy, I'm so sorry for you, so disappointed." Tears were running down the Mother's face. "But wait a day or two. Come again in a day or two." Frank moved towards the door. The Mother caught his arm. "You'll come then, Frank, won't you? Oh, you will, you will! It's your duty—your duty, Frank."

With his hand on the knob Frank turned to her.

"Never fear," he answered; "never fear, mother. I'll do my duty. Kiss the boy for me—and my love to Dad."

"And Marian? Ah, Frank—to Marian?"

"Yes. My love to Marian."

Ten minutes later, in the little back room that still was called hers, Marian, looking pale and worn, sat beside the bed, and the boy sleeping upon it. Before her stood the Mother.

"Oh, you'll regret this, Marian," cried the Mother; "bitterly you'll regret this all your days. You are wrong, I say; you should have seen him. To let him go like that! Oh, so hard you are, so cold. And he was so penitent; wanted to see you so. . . . And even then, even then, he sent you his love!"

Marian sat quite still, nor answered a word; only reached out and held the boy's hand lying limp on the white coverlet. And there for long enough she sat, whilst the Mother blamed and pleaded, listening quietly and thinking deeply; thinking of this, perhaps, among other things—that, in Frank's place, she could imagine herself demanding the right to carry her love to one whom she loved.

CHAPTER XI.

FRANK went straight home; locked the trunk, sent it off, and posted the key to Marian.

"Perhaps that will show her how I am thinking," he said, as he turned from the pillar-box. "She may stay as long as she likes," he went on. "I don't care, not a jot. I've done my best; I'll do no more. I gave her my word, not another shall I add to it. Not another," he said; then, with characteristic inconsequence, broke out: "What have I done? Would she have me a saint? And she? To leave me like that; refuse me like this! Oh, but wait," said Frank, looking mighty grim; "just wait. Soon she'll be glad to come back. I know it. And if she doesn't—? I don't care," he cried again; "I don't care a jot. And I mean to show her I don't."

When Frank Barry, in that impulsive way of his, said he did not care, we may be sure that really he cared a great deal; just as we may be certain that his efforts to show how little he cared must have mocked him to his face. In his heart he knew himself to be talking foolishness, knew Marian to have reason and great excuses on her side; knew, too, that her leaving him was a staggering blow, and her keeping away a stab as of mortal pain: but was he, Frank Barry, a man of spirit and feeling, a transgres-

sor, it might be, but a transgressor having now a partner in blame ; was he, just fresh from this repulse, to admit these things to himself ? In truth no. If he had done wrong, what now was Marian doing ? If Marian had her rights, had not he also ? He repeated, he did not care a jot ; and he meant to show that he did not. Enough of storm and stress, he had had : now for a period of quiet, of enjoyment.

So, whistling gaily, and breaking anon into some merry burden of Love and Beauty, Frank sat him down to lunch ; then smoked a pipe in the study, trying the while to conjure back fond memories of old bachelor days ; then, bidding himself rejoice in the dead stillness of the house, bent to work, and tried for the lightsome phrase and the happy touch ; then took a turn in the garden, and made minute search for the hidden and picturesque in nature : and all so vain, so pitifully false. Where was the boy with his curls and his babblement ? Where Marian, her sweet presence and ministrations ? Where the something, he hardly knew what, the something that was part of himself, and now was missing, yet haunted him in every corner of those silent rooms ?

Still, he must be firm. The illusion must be kept. He had tea, dressed carefully, went townwards ; played a game of billiards with a friend ; lounged a while over pipe and glass and sniffed joyously the rapturous air of lower Bohemia, in the narrow chamber of some fellow-dabbler in life and letters ; made merry for an hour, cracking joke, telling tale, in one of the Fleet Street taverns frequented by journalists ; at last, a French novel under his arm, a cigar in his lips, and his steps not certain, reached home again, went

quick to bed, nor knew till morning, and then not regretfully, that nearly all the time of his enjoyment the Dad had awaited him in the study.

He slept badly, rose late, came down to breakfast short in temper and appetite; rapped out an oath over a belated notice of his book, and muttering his detestation of busybodies, tore in pieces a long letter from the Mother.

His mood had mended but little, when, nearing noon, the Mother herself came and, in her gentle half-tearful fashion, went on with her counsel of mediation; drawing deeply from the wells of experience, playing cunningly on the strings of sentiment, letting stories (for some of them, may the Mother be forgiven!) of the boy's deeds, of Marian's sighs, go winged and barbed for the tenderness of Frank's heart. But like adamant seemed Frank's heart that morning. He listened abstractedly, answered carelessly; let the Mother go off at last, stumbling and groping through her tears.

"Ah, me," sighed the Mother, turning from Frank at the corner of Liepsic Road; "ah, me. Surely not? That can't be Frank? And Marian, my little girl Marian? Oh, what is going to happen?"

"Don't care," said Frank, as if answering the Mother, and strode for home; "don't care a jot. I'll not give way. I won't have this interference. I'll do as I like. I'll show her," said Frank; within ten minutes was sitting gloomily at lunch, and wondering whilst he ate if those stories of the boy and of Marian were true.

The afternoon crept by on leaden feet; evening came with gifts of headache and depression, after a

while brought sound of Dad's knock and step, and sight of his not unwelcome if very solemn face.

"Hello, Dad," said Frank, stepping forward with outstretched hand. "Glad to see you, my boy. How are you? Pretty well? That's good. I'm not first-rate myself—oh, nothing but a bit of headache. Sit you down, my son. . . . Well, how goes it," Frank rattled on, when the Dad had taken a chair and brought out pocket-comb and cigarette paper. "How's the world using you? Come, tell us something about the office. I haven't heard a word of it for months."

The Dad crossed his knees, strove to look unconcerned, spoke a half-hearted sentence or two; suddenly turned to Frank and laid a hand on his arm.

"Frank, my boy," said he, and now surely the words were heartfelt; "I can't tell you how grieved and sorry—"

No further would Frank let him go.

"I know, Dad," said he. "So am I. But no matter just now. I'd much rather you didn't tell me."

"But, Frank, my boy; I want to tell you."

"Not now, Dad; not now."

"But, Frank—"

"We'll quarrel, Dad, if you persist. I know what you would say, and I'm thankful to you. Still I'm not just now in the humour to be bothered with—"; Frank paused in search of the phrase that should show the Dad, and others maybe, how little he cared; "—with what I'm tired of. It's of no consequence, as Mr. Toots would say. Let's talk of something

else; of the weather, the price of coals, the death of kings, of anything but these tiresome personal matters."

The Dad spread hands on knees; let his shoulders droop, and sat looking vacantly at the fireplace. He felt crestfallen, bruised in feeling. He could not understand Frank. Never before had he known him in this strange mood; never heard him talk in this fashion. He was so abrupt, indifferent, the Dad thought. Surely at such a time as this, now if ever, Frank ought to speak differently from that. Talk of other things! How could he? There was only one thing to talk about. He had come round to sit a while with Frank, to talk matters over, to give his sympathy and counsel, to say how grieved he was at his children's misfortune, to express his hope that soon all might be well with them again. He had not contemplated more than that. It grieved his simple old heart to see differences of any kind between those he loved. Of Frank or Marian he believed and would hear nothing ill. It was impossible, he thought, that either could do wrong. What! Marian, his girl, the child of his heart; Frank, the boy whom he trusted and loved? Oh, impossible. There had come some little difference between them; some trifle which loving hearts were apt to let grow into ugliness and bitterness had set them apart: but only just these, and only for a day or two, thought the Dad. All would surely be well again very soon. Why, of course. He was incapable of thinking otherwise. Meantime, it grieved him sore to see Marian unhappy and away from Frank; to know that Frank, too, was unhappy and miserable. Some-

thing must be done. He had spoken to Marian ; now had come to give Frank his sympathy and aid : and Frank would not hear him ! It was unaccountable, thought the Dad, and, a cigarette paper in his fingers, sat looking at the fireplace. Talk of other things ! How could he ? If Frank would not hear what his heart had to say, why then—

Slowly the Dad rose, held out his hand and said good-bye. Oh, but he must not go like that, said Frank. Let him sit down again and have a smoke and a crack. But the Dad shook his head.

“No, Frank,” he said ; “not just now. I’ll—I’ll come again. I promised not to be long. No, no. I’m not offended. But—good-bye, Frank, my boy ; and God bless you.”

“Good-bye, Dad,” said Frank ; then, as he turned from the door : “Poor old chap ; poor old Dad. Still, I can’t help it. This is between Marian and myself. I won’t be talked over ; I won’t give way. I don’t care,” said Frank again ; within half an hour was showing how much he cared, by the exceeding boisterousness of welcome which he flung at his friend Rab Lindsay, and the fine rapture of gaiety with which he prepared for one of the great old-fashioned evenings.

It suited Rab, that evening, however, to keep silent and grave ; and, after a while, a pause coming in the flow of Frank’s chatter, he seized the opportunity to untwine his legs, rub his pipe vigorously on his sleeve, and make a remark.

“You’ll not be quite yourself this evening, Frank, my lad ?” said he ; then, on the heels of Frank’s disavowal, “I was thinking you a bit hysterical the

night ; " and following that, somewhat quickly for Rab, " What have you been doing with the wife ? "

At once Frank steadied himself, looked inquiringly at Rab and answered :

" Why do you ask ? "

Rab looked about the room ; blinked as if in thought ; slowly took his pipe from his mouth.

" Well, " said he, " I 've been wondering. I miss something. I can 't remember ever before seeing the room as it is now. And " ; Rab twisted towards the door ; " I don 't know ; but somehow the house has an empty feeling, the night. "

Frank kept silent for a breath ; then rose.

" You 're quite right, Rab " said he ; " quite right. I know exactly how you feel. I 've had that feeling myself this day or two. It is empty. She 's gone ; the wife 's gone. "

" Ay ? " said Rab. " Well I was thinking that. Will it be for long ? "

" Ah, you don 't understand. " Frank crossed to a cupboard and pulled back the door. " Come, till I show you something. " Rab rose awkwardly, limb by limb, as it were, and came. " Do you see it ? " Frank went on. " Do you see the family skellington ? Wait, then. " Frank stepped into the cupboard. " Now lift your eyes, Rab, and behold the ghastly thing of mystery and wickedness. "

Rab had had treatment like that before from Frank. Without a word, he turned to his chair, and limb by limb sat down. Frank followed him and stood, back to the mantelpiece, face to the lamp.

" Rab, " said he, " it 's no joke. Our skeleton has come at last ; it 's been here these two days : and I 've

brought it, Rab. Ah, my son, things have happened. Skeleton? I'm a walking temple of iniquity! It's true, Rab. I've been a fool. And Marian's gone; gone, I say; taken the boy and left me."

Frank paused, pulled out his pouch and began filling his pipe; without speaking, Rab sat looking steadfastly up at him.

"Yes, she's gone," Frank went on, speaking as if to himself; "the skeleton came and she went. She's quite right. Oh, yes. 'Twas all my fault—of course! But wait." Frank sat down. "I'll tell you, Rab—"

Then Rab raised a hand. "No," said he. "You've no right to tell me."

"But I have. I want you to know; I want your opinion and advice. I can't be your friend any longer except I tell you," said Frank, and silenced Rab's protests; then, briefly as he could and as faithfully as he might, gave the history of what he chose to call the Barry skeleton. Quickly, tersely, he gave it, now with something of dramatic fire (instance, that scene of the choosing and the fight); now with a touch of romantic fervour (instance, that night adventure below Nan's window); now in words of sarcastic bitterness (chiefly these in his references to Sarah Butler, to Luck that had deserted him just as he was trying to do good, to Fate that left Marian believing more than was just and more than he could disprove); at last, finished and turned to Rab.

"Now what do you think?" said he. "And what do you think of me?"

Not a word had Rab said, all the time of Frank's speaking; even now he did not answer, but turned

his eyes from Frank's face and began fumbling in pocket after pocket for imaginary matches.

"Eh?" said Frank again. "What do you think of me, Rab?"

Still Rab paused and fumbled; then:

"Have you a match?" he asked, and stretched an arm. Frank flung him a box. "Thanks," said Rab; then, in a minute: "Must I tell you?" he asked, in his deliberate way.

"Certainly."

"Then, I think the wife did right."

"Ah! I see." Frank rose. "So this ends our friendship, Lindsay, I suppose?"

"Eh?" said Rab, looking up. "What do you mean, Barry?"

"Simply, that if you believe with Marian you may as well act like her."

A slow light of laughter played on the ruggedness of Rab's face, as silently he sat plumbing Frank to his depths. He had known him for many years; was it, that even now he did not know him?

"You're a strange combination," he said at last; "there are things in you, Barry, that you don't know of yourself. Man, you're as full of whims and foolishness as a woman in her tantrums. Ah, sit down and quit your folly. You're only posing, Frank; you're not fair to yourself; you're saying what you don't mean and thinking what you don't say." Rab paused a moment. "Man," he went on, "what kind of being are you? Did it never occur to you, all the days of your foolishness, that, as sure as Heaven is above us, sooner or later trouble and punishment must come?"

Frank, now seated on the edge of his chair and clasping a knee with his hands, shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose it did," he answered, "—afterwards. Oh, I had my good days, Rab, you may believe me."

"Ay. Your good days—afterwards," repeated Rab; "and now comes the great afterwards, the time that you've laboured hard for and earnt well. Ah, but you've been a fool, Barry. The things," said Rab, in that deep crackling voice of his, "the hard-spoken things I could say to you. But no. You can say them yourself, for surely you must know them." Rab's flow of words, such an unusual happening with him, stopped for a breath. "Frank," he went on, and leant across the arm of his chair, "it's of little worth what I think or say, or what you think or say; here's the thing: What are you going to do?"

"You mean about Marian?"

"I do."

"I've told you."

"What?"

"I've told you what I did; what happened; how I think and feel." Frank flung out his hands. "What can I do? She left of her own free will. She believes what isn't true of me; accuses me of iniquities I never committed. I confessed, pleaded, promised; I went to bring her back, she refused to see me; I—" Frank paused, checked as it were by the sombre glow that lay in Rab's eyes. "What more could I do?" he cried fretfully. "Would you have me go begging and imploring, and forcing her against her will, and confessing what isn't true?"

Up went Rab's hand. Like the face of a Covenantant proclaiming his faith in the teeth of death, now was his: stern, grim almost, suffused with a strange light.

"Stay," said he; "let me hear no more. Let me keep my respect for you at least. Ah, what puny talk is this? Your miserable pride, and quibbles! Done? You've done nothing. I tell ye, Frank Barry, if ye crept on your knees in sackcloth and ashes from here to where she is, ye would na be doing enough. Man, ha' ye thought, d'ye know what you've done? Killed her trust in ye—crushed, na, burnt it out. Don't ye see? Have I to tell ye that? Has it never dawned on ye, never come in the reality to ye? Think of a woman trusting ye, Frank Barry, for years and years, trusting in ye as she would in her God maybe; and then think of all that going—at once, without warning. Ah, man, think of it. It must be just as if the temple of her life had crashed upon her head. To lose trust, faith . . . ah, it's terrible. I know it, I know it," cried Rab, as if in agony. "It's hell itself. And you, Frank Barry," said Rab again, "you of all men, you with the truest woman for sweetheart and wife in all the world; you to do this! Ah, weakness doesn't excuse you, nor youth, nor anything; you have no excuse. Ah, man, why were ye not content? Even to think of another, with such a one for your very own, devoted to ye heart and life, almost goes beyond belief. . . ."

"'Twas only long ago, Rab," cried Frank; "only in that miserable time long ago. I haven't thought of anyone else since—since—"

Up went Rab's hand again.

"Don't, Frank," he said; "don't, for God's sake. Man, I know better; you know better yourself. I can see it in your face. And don't you see? Don't you know that it's just what you've been thinking, ay, as much as what you've done, all this time, that makes the wife think of you as she does? It's the unknown things, the other things, the things that by every chance must have been, the things you have long forgotten—ah, it's these that lay the scourge to torture. Don't you see, Frank?"

"I know, Rab; I know. God forgive me for all I've done."

"And thought," added Rab.

"Yes, and thought," said Frank; then buried his face in his hands. "You're right, Rab. I have been a fool. She is the best woman in the world; there's no one like her, none. I always knew it, Rab," Frank went on, looking up; "always. Even at my worst I knew it. Ah, what devil possessed and blinded me? I was not myself. . . . But I know now; I know now. God bless you, Rab," cried Frank, in an ecstasy of enthusiasm; "never was there a better man or a better friend. You have opened my eyes, Rab, shown me my duty. Never can I forget what you've done. You've saved me from myself. God bless you, my son, and keep you!"

When Frank, or another, started talk like that, Rab usually sealed his lips and shrank within himself. The froth of sentiment, the pop and gurgle of shallow enthusiasm; these, the sight and sound of them, always afflicted him as with shivering. Plain speaking, plain doing much more; not empty mouthing, but an uprising in strength and a swift

doing ; these were what commanded his respect, were what, just now, he would require of Frank : and, he knew well, would require in vain. There was nothing heroic in Frank ; he lacked fibre, grip ; a Sentimentalist, an Amorist, a man with the stability of water and the grim outlook of a butterfly—such, so far, he had proved himself to be, and such, Rab feared, was destined to remain. Still, thought Rab, any saying or doing was better than that puny pose of inaction. The lad was good at bottom. Down under that whirl of moods and frivolities, that astonishing turmoil of weakness and ill-doing, was something worthy and lovable : might it be, prayed Rab, that this better part was now roused, and prompting to some kind of worthy deeds.

“ I’ll do everything in my power,” Frank continued. “ I’ll go to-morrow. I’ll take no denial. I’ll just take her in my arms. I won’t be without her . . . Won’t that be right, Rab ? Eh, old friend ? ”

“ Ay,” answered Rab, drily. “ Oh, ay.”

“ I’ll make every reparation. I’ll try to win back her love and trust. I’ll do everything that mortal can ; everything . . . Eh, Rab ? Won’t that be right ? ”

“ Ay,” answered Rab again. “ Oh, ay.”

“ And she’ll see such a change in me. I won’t be the same man. I’m changed, Rab, greatly changed. I feel it. This has steadied me. No more weakness from this on. Ah, I’ve had my lesson, Rab.”

“ Ay,” answered Rab, and smiled grimly at his pipe. “ Oh, ay.”

“ And how welcome she’ll be ! How I’ve missed her ! Ah, you can’t imagine it, Rab. The house

has been like a tomb—just as though the sun had gone out. No Marian; no boy! You can't understand all that, Rab. Only those who have experienced things know what it is to lose them. You come back at night to your den, or whatever it is, and it's just the same as it always has been; there's no face missing, there's—"

Quickly Rab rose; turned to the bookcase, pulled out a book and began turning its leaves.

"What's the matter, Rab?" asked Frank. Rab did not answer; so Frank crossed, took him by the shoulder and turned him to the lamp. "Why, what's this?" said Frank, at sight of his face. "Have I been talking too much about myself? You're sorry for me, Rab? Is that it, my son?"

Rab looked Frank in the eyes and smiled.

"Ay," said he. "That's it, Frank; that's it."

CHAPTER XII.

FRANK rose next morning in a flutter of good spirits; flung up his window, drank deep of the quick air, broke presently into song and cut a caper across the floor. How glorious was the morning; how splendid the young warmth of the sun; everything was gay, fresh, beautiful: to be alive, quoth Frank, was very Heaven. He felt so happy. That was to be a day of days. It had opened well; how much better was it to end, with Marian back, and the boy, and all things going as they had used? No more gloom, no more loneliness: he was going with open arms to carry Marian back. He would take no denials. She must believe him. He was so penitent; so changed; never again should he suffer a cloud to darken Marian's face. His dear wife Marian! The best woman in the world, Rab had called her; and Rab was right. He knew it now; had known it all along; only—Well, he had been careless.

What was that? Suppose, went the voice, Marian refuses to come? Refuses to forgive you? Refuses perhaps to see you again? Absurd, answered Frank. He would take no refusals; he meant carrying all before him with the ardour of husband and lover. Yes, went the voice again; but suppose you bring Marian back only to a life of silence and mistrust? You can make her come; yes. But the deeper the

love, so Rab said, you remember, the deeper the wound ; would it not be wise, Frank Barry, to give the wound time for the healing? No, you say vehemently. You are determined to go. Then go ; and the gods prosper your going. Only, whispered the voice, don't be too sanguine, Frank ; think a while, Frank, think a while. All that Rab said last night was God's truth ; but his was only the counsel, the doing is yours ; see to it, Frank, that the doing be wise.

Immediately Frank began to argue with himself (or, if you like, with that sober voice of his other self), so soon always did he begin to waver ; and so, that morning of the day of days, it was with him. One thought led to another, this doubt bred the next ; now he was ablaze with hope and enthusiasm, now shivering in their handful of ashes. He said, "In an hour I will go ;" then, "Perhaps better wait a little longer ;" then, "Maybe it were wise to wait till morning:" at last, evening having just come, rose up suddenly, said, "I'm going, Rab, I'm going ;" and went.

It took him half an hour, so greatly even now did he waver, to go the little distance that lay between home and Marian ; it was only with half a heart that he turned at last through the green gate, stepped doubtfully to the Dad's door and knocked.

The Mother answered him ; drew him in, and broke into tearful welcome.

"Ah, Frank, how glad I am to see you. I knew you would come. I've been expecting you all day. Frank, I dreamt last night that all was well again. I knew you would come." She came quite close and

whispered: "They're all in the garden, and the maid is out for the evening. Listen; you can hear the boy's chatter. Shall I say you've come?"

"No. Just let things be, mother. I'll manage," said Frank; the next minute was standing beneath the old pear tree and crying, with hands outstretched: "Here I am, Marian; here I am!" He stooped over her chair and kissed her; then greeted the Dad, snatched the boy from his knee and hugged him to himself. "Ah, my son, my son! Let me look at your bonny face. My own wee man! How I've missed you." The Dad rose and moved away. Again Frank turned to Marian. "Ah, Marian, it has been so lonely at home, and cold, and miserable. Like a tomb it has been these days and days." Still holding the child to himself, he dropped on one knee by his wife's chair. "Marian," said he, "won't you speak to me? Look at me; look at me." Slowly Marian raised her eyes; but there was no gladness in them, none. "And now smile, Marian; do, my dear. And speak, Marian, speak." But Marian neither smiled nor spoke; and, seeing that, Frank's heart grew chill. "What! Not a word?" He looked away; kissed the boy and answered something to his prattle; once more turned and spoke. "Listen, Marian. I've something to say to you, and I must say it. I've come to bring you back. I've come to tell you—"

Then Marian found words.

"Not here; oh, not now. Come," said Marian; then rose and moved towards the house; and after her, over the Dad's grass-plot and past the glory of his summer flowers, past the Dad himself and the Mother too,

bending their old backs over imaginary weeds, went Frank with the child in his arms—followed her through the parlour, and up into the little back bedroom which still was known as hers.

Marian crossed, looked down upon the garden and the old folk standing there; shut the window, turned and stood waiting. Frank closed the door, sat the boy on the bed, kissed him and gave him a toy.

"There, my son," said he, patting the wee head; "be good for a little while. Papa will soon take you again—soon take you again," repeated Frank; then wheeled quickly and took a step from the bed.

"Marian," said he, "how much longer, I ask you, is all this to continue? Don't you think you have punished me quite enough? Suppose me the greatest of criminals, am I not still your husband and at least worth the trouble of an answer?"

Not a word could Marian say. Frank took another step towards her.

"Great heavens," cried he; "what has come to you? Do you know what you are doing? Answer me, Marian; you must answer me! Do you know, I say, what you are doing?"

There came a moment or two of silence, broken only by the deep swelling of Frank's breath and the gurgle of the boy over his play; a little while of silence, with Marian standing rigid by the dressing-table, and Frank facing her with clenched hands and blazing eyes. "Do you know?" he repeated; and at the words Marian looked at him.

"Know?" she said, huskily and slowly. "Yes, I know." She stopped; drew a breath that was half a sob, and raised a hand to her cheek. "Oh," she

said," I don't know what has come to me. I'm not myself. I can't speak. I feel numbed. The life seems to have gone from me. Frank, Frank," she cried; "let me be! Give me time. I can't, I can't!"

The cry was piteous. Had it come sooner, perhaps Frank had heard, and done wisely. But now he was in no mood to understand.

"Give you time? You can't? You mean, you won't," said Frank. "You mean that it is I who have numbed you, and taken the life from you? You mean that still you believe your own imaginings rather than my words, believe me more guilty, far more guilty, than I am?"

"No, no," said Marian. "It's not that."

"Not that. Then, in Heaven's name, what?"

"It's this," answered Marian. "I've lost my trust in you, Frank. It's gone, and I can't get it back."

Then Frank remembered what Rab had said; and the remembering, coming like an echo to Marian's words, brought him a glimpse of his better self. He came nearer.

"Yes," said he. "It's that, Marian? Well, and I have come to tell you—to help you get it back. Listen to me, Marian. I've come to bring you home. You must come. I've come to tell you again, and over and over, that, as God's my judge, I've told you the truth. Hear me," said Frank, as she shook her head; "hear me out. I know I've done wrong. I acknowledge it again. I deserve to be punished. I'm willing to be punished. But, Marian, there are other ways than this. You have lost your trust in me, you say. Well, I know that. But can't I help

you to get it back? See: I'll do everything. I'll make all reparation, Marian. You'll find me ever so much better, ever so much. There's nothing I won't do. Only, you must come back with me—now, to-night. I'll take no denials." He laid his hand on her arm. "Come, Marian," said he, pleadingly. "All the trust will come back, one day, you know. I'm sure it will."

"Ah, but will it?' cried Marian at that. "How can it, how can it? It's dead—dead. I'm like stone. I trusted you so entirely. And now—now—"

"Now I've come for you, Marian."

A moment Marian stood there in the gathering dusk, stood looking steadfastly across at the boy, with eyes that never saw him; a moment stood wavering, then shivered and cried:

"If I only knew; if I only were sure! Oh, no, no; not yet! I dare not. Give me time, Frank. Give me time. It will all come right, some day. Frank," she went on, as calmly as she might, "it's wiser not. If I went now, we should—should only hate each other. I couldn't be the same to you, nothing the same. No matter how I tried, you must see how I felt, and must dislike me for it. Perhaps hate me. You would do your best at first: but—oh, I know how it would be. And I couldn't help it, try as I might. No, no, Frank! Let me be. Wait a while. It's wisest."

Then said Frank:

"Marian, I believe you hate me now."

"No, no," came back, hurriedly; "not that; oh, not that. It's——"

"What?"

"My love for you seems dead, Frank."

"It's the same thing."

"No, no, Frank. Oh, don't say that! Surely you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," said Frank, musingly, not as though he pitied Marian, not as though her words had come as a blow which some, in his place, might think worse than mortal; not this or that, but just as one speaks pitying himself in face of an injury. "I understand. A dead trust? Now a dead love? A dead love," he mused, smiling bitterly.

"Frank," cried Marian, "be just to me. It isn't dead. No, no; I couldn't think that. But it seems gone. I can't help it. I've tried—oh, how I've tried! Give me time, Frank; just a little longer." From her heart Marian spoke, and with her hands out stepped towards Frank.

It was a supreme moment, a moment of halt and choice at the parting of the ways; this tracking out through the sunshine, that going crookedly for darkness and the wilds. And Frank Barry held it in his unworthy hand, Frank whom the Piper had by the heel.

"Time," said he. "Just a little longer? And what then, pray? What of my trust and my love? What of the days I must spend in loneliness, whilst you strive to get back what you should never have lost? Your love and your trust! Oh, they were easily lost. You were quick to believe ill of me, quicker still to go and leave me. Well, be it so. Have your way. Who cares?"

"Frank, Frank," cried Marian. "Oh, my God, Frank!"

"Who cares?" Frank went on, with a fine air of indifference. "I don't, not a jot. Three days or three years; it's much the same. Stay, my dear, as long as ever you like."

Marian had drawn back, and stood now by the dressing-table, leaning upon it, her figure rigid, lips tight, and in her eyes the look of one who is stricken.

"Don't give any thought to me at all," Frank continued; "just do your best to enjoy yourself. I'll do that, I assure you. Never mind what people say. I won't. Stay as long as ever you wish; and some day ~~in the~~ dim future, when you think—never mind about the dim future. The present and past are quite enough just now. And don't think I'll come troubling you. I came a day or so ago and you refused to see me——"

"No, no," cried Marian, "I did not. I said then what I say now, that it is better to wait. I said—oh, no matter, no matter," cried Marian. "For God's sake, go, and torture me no more."

"I'm going," said Frank. "And I'll torture you no more. Believe me, I have no wish to be repulsed a third time. Twice is quite enough."

"It's false, I say." Marian stepped forward. "I never repulsed you; I do not now. Oh, and if I did, how easily, how very easily you accept—" Bitter words were on Marian's tongue, but wisely and in time she stayed them; and staying them resolved to add not another word to this pitiable scene.

"Yes?" Frank questioned. "Please keep on." Marian bit her lip. "Oh, very well. Perhaps you are wise. I think you are."

He turned to the door; and turning, in the dim

light of evening, had sight of the boy lying on the bed, feet in air and playing with his hands. A step or two, and Frank was bending over him.

"Ah, my son," he said; "my little man! How can I leave you? How can I do without you?"

There was a step behind him; he looked round, and there stood Marian, a world of pity, and of forgiveness, maybe, shining in her eyes. But Frank never saw it. Quickly he snatched the boy from the bed and held him to himself.

"No," he said, "I won't go without you. You're mine. He's mine, I say," said Frank defiantly, and clutching the boy desperately to his breast looked Marian in the eyes. "You can't keep him. He's mine, I say. Mine!"

Without a word, Marian came close, caught the boy with both hands, and so stood holding him; not fashioning a word, but just meeting Frank's look with eyes in which was now no pity nor forgiveness, but the burning fierceness of outraged motherhood only; stood there holding the boy and drawing him to her, slowly and relentlessly, whilst Frank, as if fascinated by the wonder in her eyes, gradually let fall his hands, moved back, turned and silently went out.

He went down the stairs, sat a minute in the parlour; then stepped out into the garden. Twilight had come. The air was fresh, still, laden with the perfume of flowers. He came to the grass-plot; there had dim sight of the Dad and the Mother, standing by the old pear tree. Should he speak? he asked himself. He had something to say to the Mother; they were anxious, he knew; he might not

see them again for long enough. Should he speak? No. How could he, and that scene not yet five minutes old? How could he, and Marian's look still burning in his brain? Ah, that look! Like a tigress over her cubs she had stood, fixing him with eyes of fierce defiance. Defiance? Yes, and hatred. It was all the boy now. Well, so be it. Devil cared.

He turned, crept along the path past the flowers, went through the parlour, and coming to the stair-foot paused there on his way to the door. What was Marian doing? he wondered. Had he done right? Was he doing right even then? He had left her without a word. Should he go back, just to say good-bye, have a last look at the boy? . . . Hush! Was that a sob? Yes. He must go back! . . . Yet why? She was not sobbing for him; it was over the boy. Ah, the boy, the boy! How could he leave him? What might happen before he saw him again? Oh, it was like the pains of hell!

"Let me go; let me go," cried Frank, within himself. "I'm a fool. No one cares for me now. Good-bye," he said, and waved a mock farewell up the stairs; "oh, good-bye all. And now," said he, stepping across the threshold; "now for home and duty—and," he added, "the devil knows what."

CHAPTER XIII.

VERY late that night, Frank pushed back his chair from the study table, took up a letter which he had just written and began reading it. Slowly he read, now weighing a sentence as he looked at the lamp, now repeating a phrase aloud ; presently rose and, as he paced to and fro between door and window, declaimed the letter to himself. Listen to Frank :

“ Dear Marian. For three hours and more, I have sat patiently and impartially considering the matter that has come between us. Very minutely I have scrutinised my side of the account, leaving nothing unnoticed, whether of good or ill ; with equal care have I surveyed your side of the account, and to the best of my poor ability striven to be fair to you, and to see things from your point of view

“ I need not go over ancient history. I have no wish to reopen wounds. It is not now my desire to discuss affairs, or to complicate and entangle them further ; above all, have I no wish to write bitterly, or complainingly, or pleadingly. The time for these things is past. You have said your say ; I mine. You have your view of things ; I mine. You have decided on a course of action, and are taking it ; I also have now decided—not impulsively, you understand, not without patient deliberation—on my course of action, and am going to take it.

“ You have asked for time in which to regain the trust and love which I, through my misdeeds—misdeeds wilfully distorted and magnified, be it said—have caused you to lose. You prefer to remain with your mother rather than give me the chance to aid you in your quest, rather than to do what some people—not I, remember—might call your duty to child and husband. However, let that pass. All I wish now to say to you is, what I said to you verbally this evening, that you will please me by pleasing yourself, and will do what you consider right in your own way and at your leisure. You are quite free. Far be it from me to dictate or advise. As I said, stay just as long as you like. Do not consider me at all. I am nobody now.

“ As for me and my course of action, here, briefly, is what I have decided to do. To-morrow, rather to-day, for it is now morning, I propose vacating these rooms and finding myself an humbler abode, in an humbler neighbourhood, and at a distance as far from here as may be possible. Where that may be I know not ; nor does it greatly matter. But wherever it may be, there I propose to live my life, and do my duty, and think my thoughts. My share in this break-up I shall of course take with me ; your share, so far as is possible, I shall send to you ; what remains of our home after this spoliation, I mean to lock in the study—that is, if Mrs. Smith and myself can agree to terms—there to await whatever fate and the future may have in store. . . .

“ I need not say that, at intervals, I shall send you what money you may require for your own needs and those of the boy, leaving you to make what

arrangements are necessary between you and your mother. Give her and Dad my love, and say that I am sorry to disappoint their hopes and regret my share in the trouble that has come to them. Also say that it will be quite useless to seek me. I am going I know not where, and shall leave no trace behind me. But if at any time you or they have anything of importance to communicate, then a letter addressed here may find me within a reasonable period.

"That is all. I leave everything in your hands. The future is with you. Some day, perhaps, your trust in me may come back; and then—well, I dare say I shall then be little less affectionate, and not much more of a sinner, than I am now. Only, I charge you, Marian, as God is your judge, to keep safe my little son. He is mine, mine—mine as much as yours. And some day, whatever happens, surely I will claim him. Your husband, Frank Barry."

Such, omitting here and there some redundancies of detail, was the letter which Frank Barry, that night of the day of days, wrote to Marian his wife, and such the course of action which, as revealed in the letter, he had resolved to take.

He ceased reading, enclosed the letter and stood it on the mantelpiece. "I'll send it," said he, and stood looking at it. "I'll send it," said he again, sitting before it with pipe and glass. "I'll send it," he repeated at last, rising for bed; "anyhow, here's to the future." He drained his glass. "And now let's sleep on it—the last sleep," he reflected, as he stood undressing, "in the old place for God knows how long. Well, so be it. Good-bye to you, Frank

Barry," he said, with a nod at the pale face that looked at him from the glass. "Good-bye to you, my son."

He slept soundly, rose late; breakfasted, and at once proceeded in his course of action: made satisfactory arrangements with Mrs. Smith; spent the morning in breaking up the home, this part in so many boxes for Marian, that part in a box or two for himself, the rest for untidy disposal in the study; had lunch, and went citywards; came back nearing dusk with two cabs, one for Marian's share, the other for his own; locked the study door, gave Mrs. Smith a parting word; then, by way of Leipsic Road — stopping for a minute at the Dad's to consign Marian's letter and boxes to the care of Rose the servant — of Walworth and Waterloo Bridge, disappeared into the wilds of North London: just stepped into the cab, that evening in early June, went whirling down Leipsic Road, round into Wyndham Road, and so disappeared.

And now, for a while, let Frank Barry tell his own story.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE still exist a number of portly volumes in which are recorded many results of Frank Barry's observation of men and things. These he took pride in, and gave a distinguished standing-place on the second shelf of the study bookcase. In them were set down, elaborate sketches of nature, thumb-nail portraits of men who had been met, analyses of character, odd scraps of dialogue, burning phrases snatched from the maw of time, skeletons of plots, ribs of scenes and situations, dry bones of rhyme and fable; and in one, a clasped volume that held pride of place at head of the battalion, a record, usually under date and place, of Frank's more intimate communings with himself.

This clasped volume he called his Journal. It is an interesting record, written sometimes in a species of cipher, sometimes in shorthand, but for the most part in that crabbed style of penmanship for which Frank as an author was deservedly famous. It covers a number of years, is rank with the odour of chaff and midnight oil, and nowhere, except perhaps in the dark patches of cipher and wastes of stenography, sheds any but the murkiest light on the path of our hero's life. Nowhere, till some hundreds of pages are passed, and then, quite suddenly, beyond a new leaf as it were, takes life to itself, shakes off the cloak

of mystery, and forthwith runs on as the *Journal Intime* of Frank Barry in exile; a sufficient and accurate account of his doings and thinkings all through the long period of his disappearance, and therefore of necessity entitled to its place in this record.

The leaf seems to have been turned in the day following that of his going. Here is the first entry :

June 7, 1882. Here I am. My Hegira is accomplished ; a Red letter date fixed in the calendar of my life ; a new page turned, a new era begun. Begun ? Yes, only begun. What is out there beyond the coming months ? Where and what shall I be this day month ? Ah ! That's the question, Frank, my boy. No matter. Divil cares, as my forefathers said. The boats are burnt, the Rubicon crossed ; then up eagles and at them. . . . Yesterday I came. Only yesterday ? It seems like an age since I locked the study door. There's the key hanging before me ; the key that has locked me out so utterly. Not a trace left behind me. To all enquiries Mrs. Smith must shake her head and answer, " Don't know." I've told her nothing except just this : that at irregular intervals I hope to use the study for a while, and to call for letters. . . . What will Rab say ? And the Dad, and the Mother ? And Marian too ? Suicide, they'll think, or—an intrigue and elopement. Elopement ? Oh, Jupiter ! No ; Marian won't think that. She'll know. Ah, this will bring her to herself ; will let her and them all know that I am human, and have feelings, and can give this for that. . . . Time ? She will have lots of time. I've vowed to keep away.

She must speak now, must beg and implore. Ah, and how soon she'll want me; how soon wish for the old days, and the old home, and the old Frank. And the old home is locked in the study with the old days; and the old Frank is sitting at a narrow table in a first-floor back in Kentish Town! *Tempora mutantur*. . . . I am fairly comfortable. Have two decent rooms, and a glorious outlook on a yard and poultry-rūn. The landlady seems promising; has two daughters and a piano of course, cooks tolerably and likes soap. The neighbourhood is beastly—but yonder is the Heath. Such walks I'll have there, such freedom, such play of soul and brain. Won't I work too! They'll have lots of money. All kinds of projects are a-whirl—books, stories, plays, sorrow knows what. And I feel so free, so loose and careless, as someone used to say. Live the bachelor! . . . Only, I do wish I could see the boy. I miss *him*. . . . Good-night, everybody; and my love to all who want it.

Such is the first entry on the new page. The next is shorter.

June 9. Made no entry yesterday; 'cos why, there was nothing to enter. I felt mouldy, somehow, and restless, so I went for a walk; did something; went up to town to see some fellows. To-day my head is aching. To tell truth, I have not been myself just lately. I'm lonely, and melancholy, and home-sick. I can't help it. All day I've had the strongest desire to go back to Camberwell and carry the study by storm. The dear old place! I do wish

I were there now, lying back in a chair, my feet on the mantelpiece, my pipe going, Rab talking to Mar—Perish the thought! I must fight this down. I've done right, I know . . . She doesn't care for me now. She hates me. That look as she pulled the boy from me, haunts me still. I'll never, never ask her again. She has treated me shamefully. I'm *not* so bad. If I go to the devil it's her fault . . . Oh, easy for Rab to talk! What would he have done, I wonder? I'm no angel, but damme I have feelings like another. . . . To blazes then with melancholy! Where's that pipe?

The next three entries are shorter still.

June 11. In no humour for writing. The blues are on me. Life's a blank. It's my liver—or something. This is a ghastly neighbourhood, an infernal concert-chamber of cats and fowls and shrieking engines. Camberwell—ay, Walworth, is Paradise beside it. I wish—no, I wish nothing. Just off for a spin over the Heath.

June 13. Back from town. Had to go. Couldn't work at all. Saw some fellows and had a jolly evening. After all, bachelordom has its advantages—and disadvantages. For instance, I'd like to smash a certain piano at this mortal minute, and if I had my fingers on a certain squaller's throat, I'd—oh, it's infernal! Let me get out!

June 15. I am thinking of moving. This neighbourhood doesn't suit me, I'm sure. The air must be bad. I'm all wrong. Life's a desert. Can't eat, can't think, can't sleep, can't work, can't even read.

I can't get used to the change. I'm like a blind man groping for he knows not what. This room oppresses me. Oh, for an hour in the old study! I must have it; I must or go mad. And there may be letters.

Again comes a blank day, then the following:

June 17. Went to Camberwell New Road yesterday evening and had two hours in the old room. They did me good. 'Twas like old times. The books and pictures seemed to welcome me. It was hard to come away. Hands seemed to clutch me back, voices to call me. Mrs. Smith was tearful, wanted us all back so; offered to give the rooms at any price we liked. . . . The Dad had called twice, the Mother twice, Rab once; all had gone off wondering, it seems, and incredulous. Just as I expected. There were letters, too. One from Rab—short, damnatory, just what the old chap would write; one from the Dad—long, ever so long, weighted with tons of counsel and hopes and love and goodness (God bless the Dad!); three from the Mother—three wailing litanies, yet human too, and not unwise, and not without love for me (God bless the Mother!). She says Marian tells her nothing, won't speak, hardly moves, never mentions my name, never refers to what has happened. She cannot understand her, so cold and hard she seems, so little herself. Her health is good, though; and the boy a picture. Bless him! Oh, God bless and keep him! . . . There was a letter from Marian also. Here it is: *Dear Frank—Thank you for the money. It is more than sufficient. I shall be very careful and keep a strict account. Little Frank is well. Marian.*

There! That's all Marian has to say; there's her answer to my letter! Not a word of protest against my going; not a syllable to say she cared what I did, or what became of me; nothing but just that cold, matter-of-fact note! She doesn't care. She hates me. She's glad to get rid of me. Oh, her love and her trust; how easily they died! Even to her own mother she never speaks of me. And yet—yet, I believe she does still care for me a little. At least, I hope—no! I hope nothing. Don't care. Don't care a tinker's curse! Am resolved not to mention this matter again. I'm going to work—work—work.

Pressure of work now appears to have been severe on Frank for a period. For three days he neglected his Journal, for three more made only the most trivial entries. June is nearing its end when we find the following:

June 26. I've been working like a horse; at it night and day, a very slave of the lamp. I've written the following articles and sketches. . . . Yesterday, a brilliant idea came to me as I was lying on the Heath. A beautiful day it was, glorious, heavenly. Nature and I were in perfect sympathy. Said I, within myself: Why does not some Richard Jefferies arise out of London who shall treat of Nature from a citizen's point of view? The idea grew, waxed mighty, possessed me. Said I: Here is man, place, opportunity; without more ado, started up and began observations. I succeeded wonderfully. It is astonishing how blind we mortals be. The things I've seen to-day and yesterday! Oh, the wonders, the

wondrous wonders of Nature! And we die in our ignorance, having never seen! . . . I've just finished the first article. It's good; mighty good.

June 27. Finished second article. Better and better. . . . Work is a great consoler.

June 29. Finished third article. Troublesome, but good. . . . Haven't thought of things for a week. Am getting quite hardened.

June 30. Giving Nature articles a rest. Think it better not to be in too great a hurry. I mustn't expect to conquer Nature in four days; but I've had a fling at it. . . . Am not in such a humour for work either. Had a bad night. I dreamt I was back home. I have been thinking of things again. . . . Have I done right? Does Marian care for me? Are we ever to be happy together again? Is all this only a nightmare? Surely she wants me back? . . . I can't help it. I'm miserable. Work is no use. I've been deceiving myself. Not think? Good God! I'm always thinking.

July 1. Still miserable. Started a story to-day; worked an hour, and flung the result into the grate. I'm lonesome. I'm wretched. Ah, Marian, Marian, why did you let me go? . . . Yet, I won't give way. No, by Heaven!

July 2. All day I've been longing and longing. I do want to see her so. I can't do without her. "*Let no man dream but that I love thee still.*" . . . Surely there must be a letter?

July 3. Have been to Camberwell. There was no letter. No one had called; no one written. . . . No one cares for me. I'm alone, alone! Oh, Marian, Marian! Oh, my little son!

July 4. I couldn't help myself. This evening I've been again. There was no letter. I sat awhile in the study; then rushed out. . . . 'Twas dark when I came to the gate. I did so want to see her. Yet I couldn't go in. Something said to me it would be useless; she would only repeat the old things. For half an hour I wandered on the opposite pavement, up and down, up and down, hoping she might come out, might come to the window, might do something. I never saw her. Never saw the boy. Twice I ran across to the gate, twice returned—I dared not go in. I was afraid. . . . Oh, I've been weak, weak. I swear not to go again. I swear it, by Heaven! She must speak. She knows how I love her. I did all I could. She has sent me away. I swear not to go again. Let it pass. I must fight this down. I will work. . . . I came back through Walworth. Near Camberwell Gate I met Sarah Butler. Her face was fiendish, as I passed. The devil! She always hated me. It is she who has brought all this upon me. But wait. I'll be even with her yet. Farther on, I met Nan—hanging on Ted's arm. There! I'm glad—of course. She smiled, a womanly smile of triumph, as we passed. How soon she has forgotten! It's always the way. But what do I care? Rab was right. There's only one woman in the world. And she—God help me!

July 5, 6, 7, 8. Hard at work. Have begun a novel; a real novel; a book of life, of truth, of lofty aim. I am drawing on my experience. No cheapness this time, no false sentiment, no hurry, no writing down to critic or public. I feel it is good. I have finished four chapters already. Good!

Now comes another blank in the Journal. A week passes without an entry. Apparently Frank was hard at work on his new novel.

July 16. Have just finished reading this record. Think, I've been here more than a month! More than a month; and in that time what have I not been through? I've suffered passions, tortures of hell. Never man, I believe, has endured more. How I've wrestled, and scourged myself. The torments of thought alone have been enough to madden me. . . . And here I am to-day as bad as ever. Just as lonely, as miserable as ever. I don't know what to do. What can I do? Twice I've been for letters in this last week; and still not a word. Great heavens, is a month not long enough? I can't endure it. Work is no good. Thought will out. All last week I toiled mightily; now I'm sick of the thing. What's the good? If I finished the book, 'twould only be misunderstood and slaughtered. Not another word I'll write of it. I'm sick of work, sick of life. No one cares for me. I'm an outcast. If I died here in these wretched rooms who would care? I'd be buried by the parish. And I'm Frank Barry! I'm getting soured embittered. I feel an old man before my time. Oh, Heaven knows that if I've greatly sinned I'm greatly punished!

July 17. I've been thinking much to-day of my father, of what I know myself, and of what uncle Hugh told me. Is it that I'm following his steps? Is my end to be like his—misery for companion, and death waiting in an attic? I wonder. Did he too meet some great misfortune that we know nothing

of, then, in despair, loosen the reins and go to the devil? Perhaps. And I? Who knows? Another day or two such as this and yesterday, and anything may happen. And I don't care. Not a straw.

July 18. Sent Marian more money to-day. She *must* write now. What will she say? Ah, great heavens, if she would but say what I want—what I want! This afternoon, I made a discovery. My thoughts drove me out. Hard I strode out southwards; after a long while, came to Oxford street, turned and made for the Marble Arch. In the park, at the usual corner, a crowd had gathered round a demagogue. I was tired; drew closer; rested against the railings, and listlessly gave ear. Suddenly, among the crowd, uprose a mighty voice, a thunderous bellow, a sound as of St. Patrick scattering vermin on Tara's hill: and there before me, in all his might and glory, red face, tattered coat, battered hat and all, stood John Butler—the round peg in the round hole at last! I got as near as I dared, and kept eye and ear open. John was marvellous. Really he has missed his vocation—or found it. His face shone with the light and fervour of inspiration. His gestures were regal. Never on the stage have I seen the emotions play finer havoc with the human countenance. The thunder of indignation, the flash of scorn, the withering whisper of sarcasm, the supercilious taunt, the enlivening jest: one after another, you had them hot and breathless from that wondrous tongue. Really the man has gifts. Not to one in a million is given his astonishing talent of speech. I could imagine him—educated, trained—a second Grattan, a greater O'Connell. And

there he stood, thumping the democratic tub in Hyde Park, rending the firmament with screed and brogue! Well, he is happy, I suppose; happier than most. I must see him again. Not now. I'm not in the humour for diversion. I'm waiting for—for something.

July 21. I have been to Camberwell. Here is what I found: *Dear Frank—Thank you for the money. I am most careful, and am keeping a strict account. Yes; it is quite sufficient. The boy is well. Marian.*

That is all! That is the answer to all my longing, and hoping, and waiting—that! So does she show how she feels for me! . . . Well, it's the end. I'll bear it no more. If I'm to go to the dogs, let me go merrily. Now then, jolly boys all, for a fling and a tear! Devil cares now! Come on, my sons; come on!

What Frank did during the next fortnight we can never fully know. That he let himself go, to use his words, and slid for some whirlpool or another of dissipation, seems certain; but how he let himself go, or what whirlpool received his plunge, we do not know, perhaps do not want to know. At all events, the Journal is silent, ominously silent, for a whole fortnight; then goes on:

August 5. I must pull myself together. This life is killing me. I am a beggar in pocket and reputation. I have kept indoors all evening. *I must not go out.*

August 6. I have vowed to reform. Last night I

had determined not to go out : but temptation came, clutched me by the throat, and I went. Miserable, miserable sinner ! . . . I have just locked my door and flung the key into the back-yard. Hurrah !

August 7. Much better and stronger. I am abashed.

August 8. I dare not look in the glass at my own face. I am abashed.

August 9. I must get away from here. These fellows come and tempt me. I want a change. Where shall I go ? . . . Are there any letters waiting for me, I wonder ? I'll go to see : and then. . . .

The next entry comes after a break of ten days.

CHAPTER XV.

A blank page now comes in the Journal ; then, in bold characters, *Ryfield, Co. Fermanagh, Ireland ;* and below :

August 19. Here I am. Think of it. A fortnight ago, had anyone told me I should be sitting, this day of grace, in the old armchair, in the old parlour, with uncle Hugh poring over his Bible beyond the lamp, I should have thought him mad. Like a flash the notion came. I wanted a change ; it was necessary to give up those rooms and get away from those fellows ; suddenly, as I sat pondering, I had vision of this peaceful room, the odour of peat came to me, I saw the eternal stars winking above the clustering hills ; at once I decided ; next day I started ; here I am.

I've been here four days. Uncle was really glad to see me. I thought he would never let go my hand. Sally wept. James the herd talked blarney by the yard. Uncle is much the same, in fact quite the same. He looks not an hour older than when I last saw him ; is still as vigorous, healthy, dogmatic, matter-of-fact, shrewd, forcible as ever. It is a good season, and good-humour is his. We have had many talks together, and arguments ; doubtless shall have many more. He says marriage has made an old man of

me; made me dull, solemn, inert. I know that. He often shakes me, and drags me forth to the haymaking. Sally and he are stuffing me as for the Christmas markets. He has cross-examined me fully regarding my marriage. Of course I have told no secrets. "I told you so," would come so pat; besides, this is my affair. He cannot understand why I have not brought Marian and the boy. I can. He says he has an idea that Marian is a true woman, a better woman than I deserve. That is in the old vein. Perhaps she is. Perhaps if he knew all he might say differently. Of the boy he is always talking. *There*, you may be sure, he has a ready listener. He is glad I am not the last of the Barrys; it would be terrible, he says, did the line die out in one so worthless. That also is in the old vein. He says he means to keep his eye on the boy; wants to do for him, as he puts it. Already we have discussed his career; he wants to see him an engineer, or a good workman of some kind; I talk in favour of an intellectual career, starting from a good school up through Oxford. So we are crossing swords at once. His scorn of brain-workers, your authors and scholars in particular, is mighty as of yore; and, of course, poor Frank his nephew always adorns the tale. No matter. The old man is genuine. I admire him. He loves me and mine. He means to see London, the stinkpot, as he calls it, before he dies; and all of us are due here without fail next year. Next year? What lies yonder in next year? . . . The stay here will do me good. I feel better already. Had I not run away from myself (and others) I must surely have made meat for the dogs. . . . How is the boy, I wonder?

Oh, little Frank, my son! . . . How is Marian too? Surely, she loves me still. My heart has gone out to her these last few days. Why does she not write and say—write and say?

August 21. I am ever so much improved in mind and body. Uncle constantly uses me as a testimonial to the virtues of the Ryfield air. Another week or so will set me firmly on my feet. He wants me to write for Marian and the boy. I shake my head in answer, and he looks curious. He has marked out two calves as the boy's own; these are to grow up, and their selling value invested for his future use. He urges me to start a fund for his education. I am doing so. . . . I sent Marian money some days ago. No answer yet. I believe if she writes, and not disappointingly, I'll give her uncle's invitation. . . . Often and often I sit gazing at that portrait over the mantelpiece—the face of my father.

August 22. The weather is brilliant. . . . To-day a letter came. It is little different from the others. I am striving for patience and fortitude. God pity me!

August 25. Have been renewing acquaintance with many of my old friends among the *pinstry*. Quite a fuss they make of me. Mine is a sort of triumphal progress from *boreen* to *boreen*. I love these Irish. Their simple ways, thoughts, lives, charm me: I'd like to live and die among them. Everyone asks me about the Butlers. I tell what I choose to know. I find I am not blamed at all for what I did. People think I was only diverting myself; and the idea, they say, of that Nan lifting her eyes so high! She has no friends here, and her *goings*

on after I left are a by-word in the country-side. "Moon-struck, like John's Nan," people say. Ted, too, is scorned. Said one to me yesterday: "He's dropped the bone and jumped for the shadow. He's a fool, sir." These views are interesting. They are not mine, and strange to tell are not uncle's. Nan with him is a heroine, Ted a brave boy: but mention John and he foams. My account of the tub-thumping in Hyde Park made him roar; but speak of East Street and he shouts, "Serve him right, the wretch!" . . . By the way, the old home on Inishrath is still empty. I'm going to see it to-morrow. The ferry is worked by someone on this side, and unsatisfactorily. "If Ted Ross came back to-morrow," said uncle yesterday, "I'd see him in Inishrath before a week. But no John Butler—not if he was dying!" . . . I'm thinking.

August 26. Spent all the morning in Inishrath, brooding over old familiar things, and recalling fond memories of yore. I could have wept in certain spots—Nan's garden, for instance, now choked with weed and briar, the paths full of grass, the hedges grown wild, the little place, once so sweet and trim, lying a wilderness there beneath her window. . . . I remembered that night! . . . The door was unlocked; I pushed it back and entered. Like a tomb it was, hollow, musty, damp. All over it I wandered, into the parlour, the kitchen, Nan's room upstairs. "*Oh Death in Life, the days that are no more.*" . . . The fields have little changed; except for the better, now John has gone. On top of the hill I sat me down and fell a-musing. The day was very fine. Seldom have I looked upon a lovelier prospect: the broad

lake below, the dark woods beyond, mountains far away, a low cloud-flecked sky over all. How well, I thought, it compared with a London landscape! What wonder the memory of it, to those dwellers in squalid East Street, is so poignant. And I too, I reflected, had once nearly chosen to stay there for always. Had I? Yes. If Nan, that night, had spoken, surely I must have stayed. Yet, who knows? For who but Marian ever really held my heart? "And now," said I, spreading my hands abroad, "here I sit a lonely man; Nan's love lost to me, and Marian's lost to me, and no one caring for me." I couldn't help it: tears would come. . . . I have been asking about the ferry. Everyone says Ted is the man for it. Then he must have it. Immediately I go back, I'll write or see him. Did I know that he and Nan were happy in the old place, and that I had helped them to their happiness, life would hold one pleasant memory the more for me, and I at least had done one worthy deed. . . I have asked uncle for father's portrait. His face haunts me.

August 28. In the old place again this morning. I love it.

August 29. Saw the landlord to-day about Ted and Inishrath. He hopes that Ted may come. Good. Uncle too is pleased. Good.

August 31. Off to-morrow. Must go. Can't work here. Uncle is grieved; Sally in despair; myself not very joyous. What awaits me at home? Home! Lord, what a world!

September 1. Uncle has just left me. The splendid old fellow! He is full of wisdom. He said the kindest and noblest things. . . . As he left

the parlour, he flung two envelopes on the table, saying: "Deliver those for me." In the envelope addressed, *Young Frank*, was a cheque for ten pounds—"A present from his grand-uncle;" in that addressed, *Marian Barry*, a cheque for twenty pounds—"A present from her uncle." Isn't it like him? The boy's money I mean to bank as the beginning of an education account. Marian's cheque I'll send at once. . . . Good-bye Ryfield, and Inishrath. Good-bye!

So ended Frank's second visit to Ireland. A day or two later, he is back in London, lodging now, it appears, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Edgeware Road. The Journal goes on:

September 6. I like these rooms. Bachelor life here is tolerable; daily I get more resigned to my lot. My trip has done me great good. I can work hard and well. I have no morbid or melancholy feelings, I can look at things quite calmly and dispassionately. If the Piper is sporting with me, then let him sport. . . . I've just banked the boy's money. I mean to add to it regularly. Bless his heart, he shall grow up a credit to the name. The best of everything he'll have, the best I can give him. That is my object in life now. I have also sent Marian her money, enclosing it in a letter explaining how it came into my hands. I said little else, though I restrained many things. I am curious to see her reply. . . . Father's portrait hangs before me. I talk to it often.

September 9. Read over those early chapters of my new novel. They are good. Mean to continue

it and make my name through it. . . Saw John Butler this afternoon; rescued him from his demagogic bobtail as he was leaving the Park. We had a long talk (over drink, of course—John is Professor in that art now). He does no work at all these days; except spouting and passing round the hat be called work. He is full of alcoholic enthusiasm, and the maddest simulacra of notions and schemes. God help the world, if John Butler had his way with it! Walworth and pewter pots have done for him: henceforth he is to be numbered among the March hares and Hatters. He says all are well at home. Sarah has constant work, at good wages, in some big house on Denmark Hill. Nan is altered wonderfully, he says; she and Ted are to be married next spring. Ha! . . . I told John about my scheme for Ted. He rose and fell on my neck. The very thing it is, he said; the very thing. He will see Ted at once, and make him apply to the landlord. So that goes well. I was hoarse when I had finished telling him about my visit. He cried more than once, smiting the table as he lifted up his voice; but, were I asked, I should say that his tears were gin. Poor John! London has swallowed him body and soul. He is greasy now, and dirty, and hopeless; a citizen of the slums, a pricked windbag, a hollow vessel of grimy rottenness, That is my deliberate opinion of the man: of his *tongue* I made note before.

N. B. Why not make John a character in this new novel?

September 11. Went to Camberwell this evening. Sipped port with Mrs. Smith for a while; sat smoking and reading in the study for half an hour. Rab

called whilst I was in Ireland; left no message though. There was a letter from the Mother, a long, lachrymose epistle. She is anxious about the Dad. He is getting old, she says; these last few months, she interjects in artful parenthesis, have aged him wonderfully. She fears things are not going well at his office; says that he is at last getting sight of his delusions, that dismissal would be his death, and be altogether a terrible affair. Also, she gives more than a hint that now might be a good time to see Marian. She is more cheerful, she says, and responsive to the voice of reason. Indeed! The boy, she adds, is marvellously well, and favours his father greatly. Artful old Mother! I've written, assuring her that the Dad's prospects are as good as ever they were, and that there is no chance whatever of his dismissal. Dismissal indeed! The most invaluable man (at his beggarly price) that ever held quill. . . . There was also a letter from Marian; merely thanking me for what I had sent, telling me she had written to uncle, and had banked the money in the boy's name. She adds that she and the boy are well. The note is perhaps a little less cold than former ones—but pooh! What matter? I have given up expecting. I am strangely calm and indifferent. I seem to be outliving the delights of emotion. There is growing stronger within me, day by day, the old bachelor instinct. Freedom has for me, every day, a more alluring face. Certainly, I have no desire just now to precipitate matters. Let things slide, say I; take things easily, Frank, my boy, and as they come, and don't look at life through coloured glasses. Strange that this feeling should come to me. Strange

that I don't want even to see the boy. Why, this evening, I returned by way of Leipsic Road, and strolled past a certain house without a tremor. No desire at all to rush over and carry the door by storm. Why is it? . . . I spent an hour with some fellows in town on my way home. They want to have me member of some club or another; just a cosy place where one can talk and smoke. Journalists and authors go there. Think I'll join. 'Twould kill time in the long evenings. . . . Good-night, father!

September 12. Working very hard. The novel grows. I've given friend John his place in it. My portrait is to the life. Saw him again to-day. He says Ted is considering things. Nan approves strongly. . . . Think of it! I've been an exile now for more than three months. Three months? It is longer than at one time seemed possible. But what a wizard is Time. He changes us, so that we know it not, out of all knowing. And I am greatly changed. I can't help wondering at myself. The hysterical tumults I once had; and now the unthinking calm! Such is life, my father.

September 13. Went to a literary dinner last evening. Enjoyed it. Have a *head* to-day, though. I can see clearly that for men to get on they must show themselves. I made heaps of friends last night: big men, men I should have known long ago. That's the worst of married life; it buries you.

September 15. Had lunch to-day with a great critic. I think we got on well together. He may be useful some day. The novel drags slightly; think I'll give it a rest. Just off for an hour to the club.

September 17. To-day being Sunday, I went out

to hear friend John's democratic sermon. It was immense. The amount of Atheism, Jacobitism, Radicalism, Ruffianism, and all the rest, he has managed to soak up from Walworth pewter pots is amazing; and there stood the fools agape whilst he squeezed himself upon them! . . . After a while, who should come up but Ted and Nan. It was a funny meeting. Ted was awkward at first; Nan blushed charmingly, but held herself well. They had come to thank me, said they, for what I had done for them. *They?* said I; then it was true that affairs had prospered? "Aw, yes," said Ted, looking at his boots; "we've come to an understandin' at last." "At last," repeated I, looking at Nan. "Yes," said she, and met my eyes fearlessly; "at last, Mr. Barry." I laughed and changed the subject. They are a well-matched pair. God bless them, as their compatriots do say. They proffered their thanks without stint. I received them with a wave of my hand; and looking again at Nan, asked myself for what had I not to thank her? For a great deal, it seemed to me. Still, I make no reproach. I am chief sinner against myself. Nan was simply the instrument of my friend the Piper. She looked very charming, I thought. Does she love Ted? Does she love him as somebody once taught her to love? I can answer with confidence. . . . Let that all go. I'm a hardened, dusty, old fossil now. Just before they went, said Nan: "You're often in these parts, Mr. Barry?" "Yes," said I. "Have ye flitted from Camberwell, then?" she asked, and looked keenly at me. "As butterflies flit," answered I, with a laugh. But she looked dubious. . . . A

while ago, Nan could have helped me ; a while ago, I should have welcomed her help ; now, it only occurs to me. I am indifferent. Why is it? Has the frost of cynicism set in? Or is it only the reaction? . . . Must end now. Just off to a fellow's diggings. Smoke, talk, grog ; cards maybe, after twelve. Such is life nowadays.

September 25. The entries in this Journal grow sparse, I notice. I have little to enter, and less time than of yore. Somehow, I'm always out of evenings. Life goes with me now. Old Omar, or somebody, was right: the Sapients make of the world only an inn where they tarry for a while. And a mighty cosy inn, too, when the lamps are ablaze. Eh, father mine? What are you thinking up there, so silent and calm?

September 28. How is it the old days seem so remote? I look back on three months ago as through the large end of a telescope. Time seems to have raised a mound upon them. I wonder how Marian is feeling? Is the small end of *her* glass towards me also? . . . Ah, when that day comes, if ever it comes now, won't she find me changed indeed! She has had the time she wanted with a vengeance. Now *my* love seems dead.

September 29. Mrs. Smith informed me to-day, during one of my infrequent visits to the old place, that, only yesterday, a young lady had called, asking to see me or Marian. Was it Nan? I know of no one else. What could Nan want? Oh, something about Ted's affair, no doubt. . . There was another letter from the Mother, another wail about the Dad and his affairs. Confound the Dad! . . . I put

away some money to-day for the boy. Bless his heart! How is he? I feel I want to see him. I must see him. . . . Just off to supper, etc. I *have* been going it lately. Fortunately, my luck lasts.

October 1. I've made up my mind to see the boy, regardless of consequences. Why should Marian have him always? He's mine—mine as much as hers. I'll go and *drag* him away.

October 2. Weak again; weak again. I got as far as the Elephant and Castle; there halted and turned. I knew it was useless. There would have been another scene, more bitterness, tears, reproaches; sure defeat for me in the end. I remember that tigress-look. I was afraid (there's honest confession for you); and I turned. Besides, what could I do with the boy? He is much better with Marian; oh, much better than with his reprobate of a father. Never mind; it will be all the same in fifty years; won't it, father mine? . . . Let me see. Is there anything afoot to-night? Yes, of course. That billiard handicap at the club.

October 5. I must really put on the brake. I can't afford such luxurious apartments in this mine inn. In black and white I hereby make solemn declaration, (1) To keep from cards; (2) To strangle the serpent that biteth; (3) To visit the club not more than twice a week.

October 7. Am keeping my vows strictly. Temptation comes, though. The evenings here are long and dreary. I miss many things. I have a craving. After all, is it wise completely to choke one's pleasurable instincts? Does not the novelist, also, of all men, need experience?

October 10. Candidly I make confession. I can't keep those vows. *Cui bono?* Who is it says that the wise man does not resist temptation, he yields? Knowing fellow that! Wasn't he, father? Ah, you smile and are silent!

October 16. Terrible bad luck. I lost last night—I'm afraid to reckon how much. *This must not go on.* Why, I haven't a pound to send to Marian. Shameful, oh shameful, Frank Barry! Next thing I'll be stealing from the boy's fund. Never—never!

October 18. Have changed my apartments again. Am now vegetating in one room in Bedford Street. It's nearer the seat of war. Can't write any more. I can hear the boys tramping up the stairs. Heavens, the life I'm leading!

October 22. To-day, I went again to hear friend John. There, once more, I found Nan and Ted. All is settled. Ted gets Inishrath. They are to be married soon; inside a month hope to be established in the old place. John and Sarah remain in East Street. I gave them my blessing and best wishes, and promised to see them first time I came to Ireland. So ends the second act of their little drama. . . . As I came away, Nan followed me and asked for a word. Willingly I gave ear, as we stood among the dead leaves under the trees. "It's this," she said, falteringly; "it's about yourself. What ails ye? I don't like to see ye. What's the matter?" Nothing was the matter, I answered. It was only a passing derangement of the system due to the change of season. "Ah, don't tell me," said Nan. "It's not that. It's your thoughts. I can see it." She faced me. "Why have ye left Camberwell?" she said. "Why are ye

wandering about here so often? Why aren't ye at home?" I shrugged my shoulders. "Ah," said I, perhaps bitterly, "that's a master-question, Nan. Home!" I stopped, saying there was no need to go into these things. "But there is," she cried; "there is. Oh, I know, I know; I ought to have guessed sooner. I was blind. It's because of me." She laid her hand on my arm, and looked imploringly at me. "Ah," she said, "let me do something. Ye must. I'll die, if I don't. I must. Ah, surely I can do something?" Her eyes were sweet; a great light of beauty and goodness was on her face. "Nothing, Nan," I answered. "But surely I can?" she kept on. "I know what mother said. I didn't know always, but—oh, she told lies. Mr. Barry, for God's sake, let me say what I want to say! Do. For God's sake, do!" "It's too late, Nan," I answered. "Besides, I've said everything myself." She drew back. "Ah," she mourned. "Is it so bad as that? My God!" "Yes, Nan, it's as bad as that." She paused a moment, deep in thought; then looked at me again. "Let me try," she said; "give me a chance. I can do no harm. I may—" "It were useless, Nan," I interrupted. "Best let things be." She turned on me fiercely. "But I must," she cried; "I must! I couldn't rest. The thought would haunt me to my grave. I'll never leave London till I speak. I swear I won't. Ah, tell me, tell me." "Tell you what, Nan?" "Where she is," she answered. "I've tried to find her, but—" "'Twas you, then, who called one day?" I asked. "Yes. Ah, yes. Tell me," she said again. "Ah, for Heaven's sake, do." She was not to be resisted. Besides, I knew how she

was thinking. Nan was ever noble. I told her. She burst into tears. A lump came to my throat. I turned away. It was a while before I could speak. " 'Twill all be of no avail, Nan," I said. " You can say nothing she doesn't know." " Can't I?" she answered, smiling through her tears. " Ah, can't I? Wait and see. Maybe she doesn't know ye as well as I know ye; maybe there's things I know she'd like to know; maybe—but wait and see," she repeated. " Then it's not about yourself, Nan, you want to speak?" I ventured. " Wait and see," was all she would say. . . . So we parted, perhaps never more to meet again. Who knows? My noble Nan! My sweet girl! Two good women at least, I have known—Let that go. What matters what I have known? I'm only an outcast now, a poor, battered homeless dog with a bad name; a dog going to the devil as fast as his imps can take him, going as his father went before him. . . . And Nan pitied me! And Nan is going to see her, going to tell Marian what she thinks of me! . . . It's too late, Nan! It's too late, Marian! I don't care a snap of my fingers. I'm going to the dogs. I'm paying the Piper. I'm my father's son. . . . Easy, Frank; think of the boy. Ah, the boy, the boy!

October 29. I shall go no more to Hyde Park. I must not see Nan again. I shall not go to Camberwell again. I must watch that Rab does not see me. I am cut off; I am unknown. I want to see no one. I care for no one. What have I written? *I am my father's son.* Yes, I am, by God! I glory in the heritage. . . . Oh, it's too late, Nan! It's too late, Marian!

November 4. I've no money. I owe— How much? Devil knows, and devil cares. Pooh! To blazes with thought, and care, and reputation. Life's only a shadow. Then snatch it, Frank. Be merry, old boy. Come; down with your pen and out. Damn work—damn the Piper—damn everything!

November 6. Such a wreck I am. . . . Great God! what is the end of this to be?

November 15. I'm my father's son! I'm my father's son!

That is the last entry which Frank Barry made in his *Journal Intime*. Three days after it was written, Rab Lindsay found him.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was in the Strand, not far from Wellington Street, that Rab found Frank. For a yard or two he trod at his heels, eyeing him narrowly the while; then stepped up and gripped his shoulder. Frank started, stopped, turned.

"Ah," he said. "It's you." His eyes met Rab's, slid past them, found the pavement. He shifted a step, trying to escape from Rab's clutch, looked this way towards the shops and that across the street; at last looked at Rab again. "Well?" said he.

"I have something to say to you," said Rab. "You're coming with me."

"No," said Frank. He groped in his empty watch pocket. "I've an appointment at five."

"Your appointment is with me." Rab twisted Frank round and hooked an arm in his. "Come."

"I'm not coming," said Frank testily; "I'll see you to the devil first."

"Come," said Rab, stepping from the kerb; and Frank went.

The two crossed the Strand, turned up Wellington Street, went along Endell Street, across Oxford Street; in a while stopped at the door of a tall house which stands back in an obscure corner of Bloomsbury. Arm in arm they had walked all the way and without exchanging a word.

Rab opened the door ; led Frank upstairs, and into a room opening on the second-floor landing. A fire was burning ; the blinds were drawn ; on the table stood a tea tray and a reading-lamp ; everywhere, on shelves, chairs, tables, the mantelpiece, the floor, was a litter of books and papers and trumpery.

Rab turned up the lamp, pushed an easy-chair towards the fire, took Frank's hat—he had no overcoat—and waved him to sit down.

“You'll have tea ?” said he, with his hand on the bell. “Yes? That's right.” He gave an order to the maid ; then stirred the fire, slowly straightened himself, turned his back to the blaze and stood looking at the lamp. His face was grave ; his eyes sorrowful ; he looked worn and tired, had the air of one just come from the graveside of a dear friend, come too with words on his tongue which he could not utter.

Frank had seated himself on the edge of his chair ; and now sat leaning towards the fire, elbows on knees, hands hanging limp, his head and shoulders drooping. He was pale and haggard, sharp of face and meagre ; his eyes were bright, with blue patches beneath them ; he looked nipped, shabby, debauched ; now he shot a furtive glance about the room, now stole a quick look at Rab, now coughed harshly behind his hand. Had Rab's humour been less gloomy just then, he might, seeing him, have pictured the dogs howling greedily outside in the gloom.

Presently he sat upright, laid a hand on each knee and looked at Rab.

“So you've caught me at last,” he broke out. “You've made your capture. How long, may I ask,

have you been playing spy on me?" Rab looked at him, but answered nothing. "D'you hear me?" he went on, irritably. "Can't you speak? How long have you been spying on me, I say?"

"I've been looking for you for some days, Frank."

"Indeed? And what business is it of yours, Lindsay, I'd like to know? What right have you to pry into my affairs? For two straws I'd—What do you want?" cried Frank. "Why have you brought me here?"

"I've something very important to tell you, Frank; something you must know. But wait a while," said Rab, as the maid came in with tea. "Let's have something to eat first. Come, Barry. There's meat here; and hot toast, I see; and eggs. Come, Frank."

"I want nothing," came back. "Eat? My God, I can't eat! The word sickens me. No, no. It's no use, I tell you." Frank shivered, coughed, laid his face in his hands; suddenly twisted round. "If you've a drop of—" He paused, flushed; then held out his hand. "Give me some tea, then. Thank you, Lindsay." He drank a cup. "More, please; and just a crumb of toast. Thank you. . . And now may I smoke? Don't hurry, please," said Frank, pulling out pipe and pouch. "Don't hurry for me."

Rab ate a little and drank some tea; pulled a chair to the fire, lit his pipe, and limb by limb sat down.

"It's cold this evening," said he, in a while; and again, "Ay, it's cold;" then, at last, without turning his head, "It's just this, Frank. I want to tell you that you must come back."

Frank had been lying back in his chair, legs crossed,

cheek in hand, his eyes roaming here and there; now he bent towards the fire with a quick sprawling movement.

"Ha!" he said. "I thought so. I knew it. Is there anything else you want to say?" he asked, after a pause.

"That's the chief thing, Frank; the others—well, belong to it."

"Then save your breath to cool your porridge," cried Frank, his face flushed, his eyes blazing. "I won't hear you. I want to know nothing; I want to hear nothing. Not a word—not a word—not a word," cried Frank, and pointed at Rab. "It's too late, I tell you. I don't belong to you any more. You're no friend of mine now. It's all over. Back—back!" he cried, jumping to his feet. "Never! Not if my life depended on the going. Keep away," he shouted, as Rab rose and came towards him. "Keep back; or, by God, I'll strike you!"

But Rab came on, came quite close and laid a hand on either shoulder.

"Frank," he pleaded. "Ah, Frank, old man!"

"It's no good, I tell you," cried Frank. "I won't hear you. I'll never go back."

"But listen to me; only that."

"You can tell me nothing—nothing I want to know. I don't care, not a damn!"

"Only listen to me, Frank."

"I've heard enough. Let me go." Fiercely Frank clutched at Rab's wrists and strove to twist away.

"Let me go," he shouted.

"Ah, Frank; Frank, my son. Man, if you only knew." Rab stooped, and still with his hands on

Frank's shoulders, looked him in the eyes. "Man, if you only knew," he repeated. He dropped his hands, turned away; looked again at Frank. "It is she who asked me," he said. Frank stood staring at him. "She has written often." Frank kept silent. "She has searched for you everywhere." Frank stood still. "She asks me to tell you," Rab went on slowly, "that you must come back."

A breath or two longer Frank waited; then turned to his chair, sat down, and began fumbling for his pouch.

"Thanks, Lindsay," he said, with a nod. "It's good of you. Just say, please, that you've told me." He lit his pipe, leant back and crossed his legs. "Smoke?" he said, holding out his pouch.

Rab turned from him, strode to the window and back.

"That's all you have to say?" he asked, pausing before Frank. "You've come to this?"

"I've come to this," Frank echoed. "You seem surprised?" he went on, eyeing Rab through a cloud of smoke. "You expected better things of me, perhaps?" Frank shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I ought to be flattered. But I'm not; not one bit, Lindsay. As a matter of fact, I don't seem to care what you think or don't think. Yes, I've come to this," he went on. "I'm a fine spectacle, am I not? You never thought, in the old days, that one night you'd be standing there in your respectability, looking down upon the battered outcast that sits here in your chair? No; I suppose you didn't. You thought, no doubt, I'd live a decent citizen and die a decent Christian, a parson at my elbow and a prayer

on my lips. And here I am, a Prodigal and a Pariah—a friend of publicans and sinners—a child of the devil. Look at me; look well at me! Don't think I care. Not a straw I care. I glory in what I am! I haven't a penny of my own; all I care for in the world is as much brandy as—"

Rab raised his hands.

"Hush," he cried. "Frank, Frank, you don't know what you're saying."

"Don't I?" came back. "I'm thankful to you, Lindsay. But I do know, and I want to tell you; and I want you to hear me and look at me, and then to go back and tell her who sent me to this what you've seen and what I've come to. Tell her everything. Spare not a word. Tell her I never think of her. Say I hate her as she—"

Again came Rab's protest.

"Frank, Frank! My God, if you only knew!"

"Know?" Frank went on, his voice now shrill and excited. "If I only knew? As if I didn't know; didn't expect this. A thousand times I've said to myself: Ah, wait, wait! Some day she'll want me, and then my turn will come. It has come! It's here! Go back and tell her that now my love is dead, that I never think of her, that I'll never see her face again, that—"

"Frank Barry," cried Rab, "I charge you, before God, to say no more!"

"But I will say it," shouted Frank and rushed to his feet; "I'll say what I like. You've brought your message; then take my answer. She drove me to it; she drove me, I say. Oh, I remember your heroics. It's easy to advise—mighty easy. I was to go in sack-

cloth and ashes and go on my knees. . . . But I went; and she asked me for time—said she hated me. Yes, she did, Lindsay. I say she did, as plainly as woman ever said it. . . . Well, I've given her time. Yes, I've given all she asked—and more; and more!" Frank raised his hands and cried as in an ecstasy of triumph. "Now, it's my turn—mine! Back? I'll never go back! She may search the world for me; she may write for ever; she may send messages till eternity, and I'll only laugh as I laugh now. Now she wants me, now she writes—Writes? Where's her letters?" asked Frank, fixing Rab with a cunning eye.

"At home, Frank—waiting for you at home."

"Home? Oh, yes. Home! Lord, what a world it is. . . . Well, they may wait there. I don't want to see them—Yes, I do. Ah, they'll make pleasant reading. I'll remember, when I see them, all the little notes I've had, notes so full of love and sweetness, so short and simple, so wifely and tender—"

Rab took another turn across the room; stood a moment with his face to the blind; turned and faced Frank once more.

"Barry," said he, "I ask you again to say no more. It's pitiful; it's pitiful. No," said Rab, raising his voice against Frank's; "say no more. Don't make matters worse. You don't understand. You don't know what you're saying. You're fighting your better self. I don't believe you; I can't. . . . Ah, I know how you've felt; I know what makes you speak like that. There have been faults and blunders. You were weak—and she was proud." Rab was speaking brokenly, as if to himself. "You wanted leading—she wanted persuasion. It would have been

better to have come back to you and tried for the best. . . . But what matter now? All that is nothing. Ah, Frank Barry, the foolish things you've said this night, the things you'll be sorry for all your life. Man, you've no choice. You must come back. Listen, Frank. Everything is forgiven. Everything is explained. There won't be a question, not a word—Wait, wait. Let me speak."

"It's no use," cried Frank. "It's too late. I'll never go!"

"You're coming back," Rab went on. "You must come. Frank, she has something to tell you, something I can't tell you."

"She may keep it," cried Frank. "I'll never go!"

"Only for an hour," pleaded Rab; "just to hear what she has to say?"

"Not for one minute."

"Remember the old days, Frank; remember your vows. Think of all the blessings she brought you; think of all she has suffered for you."

Frank stood frowning at Rab.

"Blessings!" he cried. "What blessings? Tell me one she hasn't blotted out over and over in these last five months. And her sufferings? Hers! And what of mine—of mine—of mine?" cried Frank, shooting forth his hands. "My God, if you only knew, Lindsay!"

"I know," said Rab.

"Know? You don't know anything. Ah, I could tell you things. . . . And you talk of sufferings!" said Frank. "And you talk of blessings! Tell me one that—"

"There was the boy," said Rab, quietly.

Frank's hands fell. He stepped back.

"Ah," said he, softly; then slowly sat down, leant his cheek on his hand, and fixed his eyes on the fire. "Ah, yes," he said; and at the words, Rab hid his eyes for a moment, then turned down the lamp and sank into his chair.

"There's something I want to tell you, Barry," Rab began, in a minute or two; "something about myself. I've never spoken of it before; I wouldn't speak now only I think the telling may help you a little. You remember," Rab went on, after a pause, "asking me in the old days to give some account of myself. You used to say I was a mystery and to joke me about my ways and my habits. Well, I never denied anything. I couldn't. But I couldn't speak either. It was—I couldn't. . . .

"There isn't much to tell you; and it's an old story, and not very cheerful. It began a long time ago, soon after I came to London." Again Rab paused; in the dim light, Frank sat looking fixedly at him. "You—you never knew I was married?" Rab went on, hurriedly; then, quick on the heels of Frank's exclamation: "Yes; it happened more than twenty years ago. She was a London girl—Ah, never mind that now." Rab was finding it hard to speak. Mechanically he pulled out his pouch, bent towards the fire and began filling his pipe.

"We were very happy, at first," he said, in a while. "We were poor, but we had health and hope. There was one child, a boy. We called him Rab. He was a fine lad. I was fond of him." Again Rab paused; again went on, haltingly.

"I don't know how it began. Maybe it was temp-

tation ; maybe she inherited it : but—but the thing came. She took to drink. I did my best with her—my very best. And she tried ; ay, she tried hard ; but 'twas no use. She got hopeless. She lost her love for me. She became pitiful to see. It was terrible at home. And then—then she took to worse than drink. She shamed me. I couldn't bear it. I turned her away. Ah, it was terrible : but what could I do ? There was the boy to consider ; and I was hard ; my heart was hard. . . . So I turned her away—and forgot her—and set up the lad as an idol in my heart. I worshipped him. I lived for him. He was my God. . . . And one day God smote me for my sin—and he died. . . .

Rab sat hunched upon his chair, one arm lying across his knee, the other hanging limp by his side, his head bowed in an agony of humiliation. Then said Frank : “ Poor old Rab ; poor old man ; ” and at once Rab resumed.

“ It's a sin,” he said, “ to set up these idols in our hearts. It's a sin against God. He punishes us always. And I was punished. He died and I was left alone. It nearly broke my heart. It made me hard, desperate. I raved against God and man. It seemed so cruel. My child—my boy ! . . . For months I lay in darkness : then, one day, light came and I saw my sin ; saw too what was required of me. I saw for what I was punished, all of it. I had been merciless, selfish ; unforgiving and proud. I saw it all ; and at once I seemed to change. I don't know how it was ; all I know is that I changed, got more patient with worries and troubles, found it easier to bear with people and forgive them—No matter about

that now. It's nothing to boast of. . . . And then, one day, I found her and brought her back. Ah, she was weak and hopeless. But I did my best. I found things easier to bear. I did my best. It wasn't much, and it wasn't for long. . . . She died two years ago."

Rab ceased, sat a minute looking at the fire; then went on filling his pipe.

"Poor old man," murmured Frank, "poor old Rab." He leant across the arm of his chair. "Lindsay, you'll forgive me for those old jokes, won't you? I didn't know."

"There's nothing to forgive, Barry."

"But why didn't you tell me? Give me a hint even?"

"It was impossible. The worst had happened when I came to know you; then I dared not speak. Afterwards I could not. Frank," said Rab, turning, "I don't know why I've told you this, except that something compelled me, and I thought it might help you—now and afterwards—and let you see how well I can sympathise with you. Ah, I know, lad, what you've been through, and I feel for you. I don't want you to tell me anything. But, Frank, lad, this must be the end of it. You've punished yourself enough. You must start again. There's duty before you." Rab leant towards Frank. "There's work to do, lad. No shrinking now. Frank, the Dad's evil day has come; he leaves before Christmas. It's quite true. You'll hardly know him. Everything came at once—everything. Ah, Frank, lad, you have much to hear." Just a moment Rab hid his eyes. "So you see what's before you. He'll

have nothing, or next to nothing; henceforth the mother and he are in your hands. Frank, you see, don't you?"

"I see," answered Frank. "Poor old Dad! And—this of course troubled him, this and everything?"

"Yes; this—and everything."

A while Frank sat thinking; then:

"They'll be glad to see me?"

"It will be like new life, Frank."

Another while Frank sat thinking; then:

"And—and Marian? You're sure, Rab; quite sure?"

"Sure! Frank, death is not surer."

Yet another while Frank sat silent; then:

"I'll come, Rab," said he, rising. "Tell them I'll come."

Rab rose also; crossed and took Frank by the shoulders.

"I knew it," said he. "But it's now, Frank," he added; "to-night."

"To-night? Now! Oh, I can't. Like this?"

"Yes. Frank, if you knew how much she wants to see you, how much—" Rab paused; hurriedly continued. "You mustn't waste a night." He took Frank's arm. "Come, old man. Why, it's going home, Frank—only that!"

Frank stood staring at the floor, a finger on his lip and his brows puckered; stood pale and irresolute, with the devil of his shame pushing this way and Rab's strong hand pulling that; at last, his face brightening suddenly, raised his eyes.

"I'm ready," said he; then put out his hand. "Lindsay, can you forget all that—all *that*?" As if

indicating the past, Frank threw a half-glance backwards over his shoulder. "Can you, Lindsay? And can you forgive? Eh, Rab?"

And for answer, Rab gripped Frank's hand and met his eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was nearing seven o'clock when they started for Camberwell. The night was chill, gloomy; the pavements were foul and slippery; there was no sky, no stars; like ghosts wandering forlorn through dreary passages in some unspeakable hell, sped the figures of the passers-by.

Though he was well muffled, and wrapped warm in Rab's overcoat, Frank, stepping quick into the raw air, shivered and started coughing. It was distressing to hear him. Time and again he had to stop, fighting for breath. "Oh, Lord, Lord," he would say, with a gasp; "this will kill me."

"How long have you been like that?" asked Rab, in a while. "Only a week or so? Well, you've got something that's a week too old. Here," said Rab, turning along the Strand; "let's go and have a bit to eat."

A cutlet and his share of a bottle of wine, worked wonders with Frank; stopped his cough, brought colour and life to his cheeks; presently, sent him stepping firmly and buoyantly—for they had decided to go on foot—along the pavement, and over the dreary length of Waterloo Bridge. And Rab, striding silently beside him, was glad at the change; glad as it was possible for mortal man with Rab's

thoughts and inside his cloak just then to be. "It's bad enough," he said to himself; "but not too bad. Thank the good God I've found him in time."

At first, Frank said little; but, once they had crossed the river and were come to the glories of Waterloo Road, his tongue loosened and he fell to questioning Rab about the Dad. How was the old man? How was he taking the blow? How had the blow come?

"Surely it was the last thing in the world," said Frank, "I expected to happen. A man like that, slaving his faithfullest for the wages of a boy! Surely, it's cruel."

"Yes, it's cruel," answered Rab; "but so is the end of most things. And surely, of all men living, cruelty comes hardest to him. He expected so little, gave so much; asked nothing but to keep his delusions to the end. Even now he hopes, sits yonder below the pear tree, telling himself that it's all a dream. But it isn't. The dear old man! There's no hope at all. I've been to see. They said simply, those men of sawdust, that his place was wanted; they were sorry, but so it was."

"Poor old Dad," said Frank. "It will kill him, Rab. It must be like tearing out his heart. But wait! Oh, I'll work. I'll make amends for all I've cost him. . . . Rab, I have an idea. Do you think we could all manage together, the five of us, in the Dad's little house? It would be like old times. The garden might save him. I could manage. Oh, I'll work! I'll make amends. I'll let them all see. . . . Eh, Rab? What do you think?"

"I think with you, Frank. And I hope—" Rab

paused. He dared not hope much. Frank's plan was good, his resolves worthy; but what of Frank himself? Had he learnt his lesson? Had he strength to face all that was before him, that future which lay out there, dark and very troubled? Rab hoped so. He prayed so. But who could tell? "I think with you, Frank," he said. "And I hope for the best."

"Good," cried Frank. "I'm so glad. Ah, it's well to feel like this. Rab, Rab, I've been in hell these last few weeks. Ah, what I've suffered! But now. . . ."

Like that Frank talked, and strode along, full of hope, of contrition, finding his old self, bit by bit, at every step; after a while, raising his eyes and finding himself in the pastures of Walworth, changed his tone and began talking of Marian.

How was she? he asked. Ah, he wanted to see her so. All that of a while ago had been only talk. Down in his heart, always and very greatly he had loved Marian. Five months ago, the leaving her, the keeping from her, had been terrible. Only a word he had wanted to bring him flying to her. But she had sent none. "Why was it, Rab? Why, long ago, did she not send?"

"Perhaps she was waiting for you to come, Frank."

"Ah, maybe so. But I had vowed that she should send. And she did not. Then, I grew bitter, indifferent; then, the devil seemed to clutch me. . . . but always, Rab, even at my shamefullest, always I was thinking of Marian, of her and the boy. I fought against the thought. I wouldn't admit to myself

that I cared a straw. But I did. Rab," said Frank, halting for a step; "you believe that, don't you? You know it?"

"I believe it, Frank. I know it."

"And she? Does she, Rab, believe it?"

"It's for her to tell you, Frank."

"Yes, yes. Ah, she will believe me," cried Frank, and once more turned his face, his shining face, for home and Marian. "I'll make her," said he, speeding through the mirk along Walworth's dreary pavements. "Come along, Rab; come along. . . . But you're sure, Rab?" he asked, stopping again. "Tell me. You're quite sure she wants me as much as—? You're sure, Rab?"

"I'm certain, Frank. Oh, man, man, don't you know it!"

"Yes; I know. And you say she has written, and has been looking herself for me? Then—then—" Frank pondered a moment. "Tell me, Rab. Why should the change come now? Why did she not write four weeks ago, five weeks ago?"

"Oh, ask her, Frank," cried Rab. "How should I know? Wait, Frank," pleaded Rab, as one pleads with a child. "It's only a little longer."

"Only a little longer," repeated Frank. "Yes; we're getting nearer. How often I've trod these shining sidewalks. Ah, the squalor, the horrible gloom! Look at the people, Rab; look at the shops—" He paused; stopped: just across the way was East Street. East Street? Down there lived the Butlers, lived Sarah, and John, and Nan. Nan? Was Nan living there now? And—and— Turning, he took Rab's arm; walked a yard or two; then:

"Rab," said he, "just one word more. Has anyone—a girl—been to see Marian within this last month?"

"Yes, Frank."

"And Marian saw her?"

"Yes, Frank."

"And then Marian wrote?"

"Frank—Oh, man, man," cried Rab, "why ask me these things? How should I know?" He laid a hand on Frank's arm. "Be patient, lad; be patient. The wife will tell you—tell everything. What I know of Nan Butler is not very much; but—"

"Finish, Rab; just that."

"She might be Marian's sister," said Rab: and said no more.

They skirted the whirlpool of the Gate; left behind them all the turmoil, the gloom of Walworth, and entered the confines of Camberwell: and now, home and Marian being almost in sight, did Frank's blood quicken and his tongue run free. Let them hurry. He was so glad. The night it was! Think of the past miserable weeks, think of two hours ago even; and now he was coming back, coming home! Soon he should see them; soon have Marian in his arms, and the boy on his knee. Let Rab come along. Ah, he was so glad! How could he help it? It was like sighting Heaven from the portals of Purgatory.

"Come, Rab; come," said Frank, taking Rab's arm. "Man, the boy will be in bed if we don't hurry! See; here's Wyndham Road. We're almost there; oh, come along! Why are you dallying so? I want wings. If you only knew how I want to see him! For five months I haven't set eyes on him, five long months. All I had was a photograph, that and my

thoughts. And how I've thought! Rab, as God's above me, I believe thinking of him kept me from damnation. . . . What's the matter, Rab? What is it, old man?"

"It's—nothing; it's nothing." Rab paused. "Frank," he went on, "I've something—" Again Rab paused. "Frank, you remember what I said about setting up an idol in your heart. It's wrong, Frank; it's a sin; you'll be punished for it some day."

"I don't care," cried Frank. "I can't help the future. It's now; it's now! He is my idol. I want him. I want him. I want to feel him, to hold him—Let me go," cried Frank, shaking off Rab's hand. "I'm not going to hear you. I don't care. I don't care. See; here's the Road. . . . No; I won't listen. Damn you, come along! . . . Then stay there; I'm off."

They were now in Leipzig Road. No one was near. Heavy hung the November gloom on road and pavement. Frank started running. Rab followed, calling, "Frank, Frank—wait, lad, wait—Frank, lad, just a word;" then, getting no heed, ceased running and stood panting on the pavement, his hands clenched on his breast and his voice going, "Ah, my God! . . . I couldn't; I couldn't. . . . Ah, lad, lad!"

But Frank ran on; came to the green gate; rushed in and knocked hard on the door. How long they were! He knocked again, panting the while and fighting a burst of coughing. Hark. Yes. At last!

"Why, Dad, my son! How are you, Dad? I'm back. I'm back!" He caught the Dad's hand and wrung it. "But where's Marian? And the Mother?"

And the boy ? Oh, I know ; I know ! ” Not a chance did he give the Dad, standing shrunken there in his Pensioner’s broadcloth, to speak ; not a second look did he give at the Dad’s haggard old face. Like a flash he was along the passage, calling, “ Marian, Marian ; ” like a flash was through the doorway and into the little parlour, arms out, voice crying and calling, “ Marian, Marian ! Here I am ! ”

Across the room, Marian, all in black, was coming, a flush on her face, joy shining in the pity and sorrow of her eyes. Just risen from her chair by the fire, stood the Mother, in black also and big with tears. And on the table, in black-edged envelopes, were cards, bearing the emblem of a dove and the name of the boy.

THE END.

